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The two forces met with a tremendous shock.

# ARMY BOYS MARCHING INTO GERMANY

OR

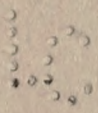
## OVER THE RHINE WITH THE STARS AND STRIPES

BY

HOMER RANDALL

AUTHOR OF "ARMY BOYS IN FRANCE," "ARMY BOYS IN THE FRENCH TRENCHES," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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## BOOKS FOR BOYS

### ARMY BOYS SERIES

By Homer Randall

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ARMY BOYS IN FRANCE
Or From Training Camp to Trenches

ARMY BOYS IN THE FRENCH TRENCHES
Or Hand to Hand Fighting with the Enemy

ARMY BOYS ON THE FIRING LINE
Or Holding Back the German Drive

ARMY BOYS IN THE BIG DRIVE
Or Smashing Forward to Victory

ARMY BOYS MARCHING INTO GERMANY
Or Over the Rhine with the Stars and Stripes

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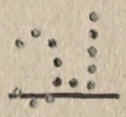

*Army Boys Marching Into Germany*

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# ARMY BOYS MARCHING INTO GERMANY

## CHAPTER I

### THE DISGUISED OFFICER

"WE'LL hold this position, boys, if we die for it," exclaimed Frank Sheldon, as he wiped the grime and sweat from his face with his sleeve and reloaded his rifle.

"We'll die all right," muttered Tom Bradford, as his rifle cracked and accounted for another German, "but we'll take lots of those fellows with us anyway."

"There doesn't seem to be any stopping them," grunted Billy Waldon. "Looks as if the whole German army's wading into us."

"Heinie's there with the goods all right," admitted Frank, "but it's his last kick. He's about due to pass out now. We've got his number."

"Don't be too sure of that," cautioned Tom. "It's still a long, long way to the Rhine."

"Stop your chinning, you fellows," warned Billy. "Here comes another rush. Stand fast."

Down over the slightly sloping ground came a great wave that threatened to engulf the little band of army boys who were holding the position.

A hail of bullets and of hand grenades met the assailants and tore great gaps in their lines. Men by the score threw up their hands and fell, but their comrades pressed on over them in a fierce determination to wipe out once for all the American detachment that had been holding them so obstinately at that point of the long battle line on the edge of the forest.

"They're gluttons for punishment," panted Tom, as he pumped bullets into the oncoming ranks until his gun grew hot in his hands.

"It'll be hand to hand this time," gritted Frank between his teeth. "Bullets won't stop them. We'll have to give them the bayonet."

"That's what," growled Bart, as his fingers tightened on his gun stock and his muscles tightened.

"I'm glad of it," muttered Billy. "I'm tired of lying here and holding them back. I'm aching to get into the middle of that bunch and give them a taste of cold steel."

"They're twice as many as we are," observed Frank, "but that's just about right. One American ought to be able to handle two Huns and give them all that's coming to them."

On came the enemy until they were so close that the boys could see from the marks they bore that they belonged to the Prussian guards, the choice troops of the German army.

"Tough nuts to crack," muttered Tom, "but we've cracked them before and we'll do it again."

Nearer and nearer that mass of field gray came until the boys could literally see the whites of their eyes.

But it was no part of the American plan to take that shock standing still and give the enemy all the benefit of the momentum. A bugle rang out with a call that the boys well knew and that thrilled them to the marrow. Then down the line came the sharp, quick command:

"Fix bayonet. Ready. Charge!"

The American boys swarmed out of the trenches and with a shout rushed forward to meet the foe.

The two forces met with a tremendous shock that seemed at first as if it would annihilate them both. The impact was terrific. The Germans had the advantage of a greater momentum, but this was offset to some extent by the fact that they were more tired by their exertions while the Americans were comparatively fresh.

There was very little firing done now. The machine guns on either side had ceased, as they were as likely to mow down their own men as the

enemy by shooting into that dense mass. Rifles and revolvers were used until their charges were exhausted. Then revolvers were thrown aside or hurled into opponents' faces, the rifles were used as a backing for the bayonet or whirled about the head like a flail, and the fighting became a conflict between individual men or groups battling to the death.

For a few minutes it was a mêlée of hacking, clubbing and stabbing. Men by the dozen went down, killed or wounded. Some of the latter, who could still move, crawled or fell into shell holes that offered some slight measure of protection. Often a pair of combatants went down together, locked in a close embrace from which neither of them rose again.

Frank found himself engaged with two husky Germans who attacked him at the same moment. He side-stepped one and drove his bayonet through the shoulder of the other. He tried to withdraw it, but could not pull it out before the other German was again upon him.

Like lightning he dropped his hold on his gun, his fist shot out and landed flush on his assailant's jaw. The man went down, and Frank, content with having put him out of action, wrenched his gun free from his other fallen enemy and hurried to the help of Tom, who was hard beset.

Whirling his gun about his head, he cleared a

space about himself and his panting comrade. A moment's respite and again they plunged into the thick of the fight.

"Hot stuff, eh?" said Tom, with a twisted grin on his lips that had been cut by a glancing bayonet thrust.

"Hot's the right word," gasped Frank. "Where are Bart and Billy?"

"I don't know," replied Tom, and then, as a group of Germans surged in upon them, they said no more but went at it tooth and nail.

It was not an easy victory, for the Germans fought desperately. But victory at last it proved to be, as the Yankee boys pressed forward with that same splendid get-there-or-die spirit that they had shown ever since the first glorious days at Belleau Wood and Château Thierry. Soon the long lines broke up into separate groups and a few minutes later the Germans began to retreat, slowly at first and then more rapidly, until the wood in front of the old Thirty-seventh had been cleared, and the American line had been advanced far beyond where it had been when the fighting had begun.

The Americans had lost a considerable number of men, but not so many as the enemy, for the ground was covered with German dead.

Frank had come through unscathed, except for a slight ridge in the scalp that a bullet had barely

grazed, but Tom's cut lip had swelled so that his mouth was twisted in a ludicrous shape and he could only speak with difficulty. At any other time Frank would have been inclined to "guy" him over the comical appearance he presented, but now, as always after a hot fight, his first thought was of Bart and Billy. He looked about him anxiously, but could see nothing of them as his glance darted in and out among the trees.

"Could anything have happened to the old scouts, do you think?" he asked of Tom.

"They'll turn up all right," answered Tom, with more confidence than he really felt. "There's Billy now," he exclaimed with great relief, pointing to the right, "and I'm blessed if the old boy isn't driving a couple of Huns in front of him."

It was Billy, sure enough, as jaunty and chipper as ever, walking behind two Germans who shuffled along sullenly enough. Billy's face broke into a broad grin as his friends hurried toward him.

"Some class to this child," he chuckled, as he indicated the prisoners. "Copped them out all by my lonesome. But where's Bart?" he asked, his tone changing as he noticed the absence of his comrade.

"That's just what we want to know," replied Frank with great uneasiness. "He got away from

us in the early part of the fighting and we haven't seen him since."

Billy signaled to Fred Anderson, who was passing.

"Take these fellows back to the pen, will you, Fred?" he asked. "I want to help the boys hunt up Raymond."

"Sure thing," responded Fred good-naturedly, as he relieved Billy of his charges.

"Now," said Billy, "let's get a hustle on and hunt among the wounded."

Each of them felt in his heart an awful fear that something worse than wounds might have come to Bart, but by common consent they kept the word "dead" away from their lips and tried to keep it away from their minds. All of them had been face to face with death again and again and had been wounded more or less severely, but so far death had spared them and the four had grown to feel that they would all pull through safely. But Bart was missing. Had a break come at last?

Already burial parties were going up and down the field and the stretcher parties were gathering up the wounded to convey them to the advanced dressing stations. The three chums attached themselves to these and searched frantically among both the wounded and the dead.

For some time their search was unavailing,

and then suddenly Frank gave a call that brought the others instantly to his side.

"I've found him!" he cried. "But I don't know whether he's living or dead. Help me to get him out of this pile of bodies."

In a moment their sinewy hands had extricated their comrade, and Frank knelt down and lifted Bart's head in his arms, while Tom tore open their chum's shirt and put his hand on his heart.

There was a great gash in Bart's forehead from which the blood had flowed freely. His face was as pale as chalk except where it was streaked with blood, his eyes were closed and he showed no sign of life. But just as Frank was fearing the worst, Tom gave an exclamation of relief.

"He's alive," he cried. "His heart is beating."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Frank fervently and was echoed by Billy. "But I'm afraid he's pretty badly hurt. We've got to get him to the hospital in a hurry."

He called out to a couple of litter bearers and they hurried toward him. With infinite care and tenderness they lifted Bart and put him on the stretcher. They would have taken him to the hospital themselves, but that was the work of the bearers, and duty held the boys to the line that might at any moment be assailed by the Germans in a counter attack.

"Good old Bart!" murmured Frank. "He's alive anyway and while there's life there's hope."

"Bart's luck will stand by him, all right," prophesied Billy, reassuringly. "But that was a fearful swipe he had across his forehead. It must have been made by a bayonet."

"I don't think so," said Tom, who had been looking about him. "See that stump? It's covered with blood. Bart stumbled over a body or something and struck his head against this stump and it's knocked him out."

Further conjectures were deferred by a sharp, quick summons for the men to get back into line. An aviator had signaled that the Huns were again preparing to attack with fresh regiments that had been hastily brought up, and the old Thirty-seventh, like the veterans they had become, hurriedly consolidated their positions and awaited the worst that the enemy could bring against them.

Just then there was a stir in the lines and a staff officer, in the uniform of a colenel, came galloping up, attended by an orderly. He dismounted, threw the reins to the orderly and came up to a group of the Thirty-seventh's officers.

"Who is in command here?" he asked briskly.

Major Willis, who had charge of that portion of the line, stepped forward and saluted.

"I am," he declared.

"Orders from headquarters," said the newcomer, as he returned the salute. "You are to retire from this position at once and fall back to your former line of defense. The enemy has been so strongly reinforced that it is inadvisable to remain where you are."

The major looked his surprise and seemed about to protest, but instinctively discipline asserted itself and he again saluted and turned to give the necessary orders.

The boys had been standing near enough to hear the conversation, and Frank, happening to catch sight of Tom's face, was startled. His face was pale and his eyes were blazing.

"What is it, Tom?" he asked in a low voice and put his hand on his comrade's arm.

But Tom shook off his hand and sprang forward. His voice rang out like a trumpet.

"It's a lie!" he shouted. "That man is a German spy! Seize him! Seize him!"

# CHAPTER II

## TRAPPED

THE effect of Tom's words was electric.

It was unexampled. It was a flagrant breach of discipline that under ordinary circumstances would be unforgivable. A non-commissioned officer sprang forward to thrust him back into the ranks. But the major, after a lightning glance at Tom and then at the strange officer, intervened.

"Just a minute," he said. "Bradford, come here."

Tom stepped up in front of the major and saluted.

The newcomer here made a protest. His face had flushed a fiery red when Tom had shouted his accusation. Then he became as white as chalk. But he pulled himself together and took on an air of assurance.

"Upon my word, Major," he said arrogantly, "the discipline in your command is deplorable. Kindly send this young madman to the guardhouse and obey the order I gave you. You disobey it on your peril."

He turned as though to mount his horse, but Frank was too quick for him. Like a flash he tore the reins from the orderly and held them. The strange officer made as though he would snatch them from him.

"Stop!" ordered Major Willis. "Sergeant," he went on, addressing a non-commissioned officer, "stand ready with a squad of men. Take that orderly into custody and surround this officer. Now, Bradford," he went on turning to Tom, "what made you say what you did?"

"Because it is true, sir," replied Tom. "That man is an officer in the German army. I saw him when he was wearing a German uniform in the German lines and plotting with an American traitor."

There was a stir in the group, and the accused man gave a start that was not lost on the major, who was watching him intently.

"That is a serious accusation—a terrible accusation," said the major gravely. "If it is true, it means death to this man. If it is false, it means severe punishment for you. Are you sure of your facts?"

"Perfectly sure, sir," affirmed Tom. "It was after I had been captured by the Germans and was trying to escape. I was hiding up a tree in the woods. Rabig—you know Rabig, sir, the man we're holding for court-martial?"—the ma-

jor nodded—"Rabig came into the woods and sat down under the tree I was hiding in. This man"—pointing to the accused—"met him there and they talked for a long time together. Money passed between them. Then this man went away and I dropped down on Rabig, overpowered him, took away the pass the German had given him—and got back to our own lines."

The alleged German here interposed.

"Is it possible," he exclaimed, "that you attach any weight to a mere resemblance, admitting that this fellow is telling what he believes to be true? There may be a thousand men in either army that look like me. Let us have done with this nonsense."

There seemed some force in this and the major looked inquiringly at Tom.

"There's no mistake, sir," persisted Tom. "I'd know his face among a thousand. But there's one thing that will prove I'm right and that even he himself can't deny. The man who was talking to Rabig had the end of the third finger missing from his left hand."

Every eye went to the stranger's left hand. It was encased in a riding glove and there was nothing to indicate that it was maimed.

"Will you kindly remove your glove?" asked the major with ominous politeness.

"I refuse," objected the strange officer hotly.

"This is an indignity. I shall report these proceedings at headquarters."

"Remove your glove," demanded the major sternly, and at the same time the sergeant and his detachment crowded about the accused, ready for instant action.

There was no help for it and the officer obeyed. *The first joint of the third finger of the hand was missing.*

A shout went up, increasing to a roar, as the detected spy made a sudden dash through the guard surrounding him, reached his horse, and with surprising agility vaulted upon his back and dug his spurs into his sides.

The horse reared high in the air with sudden fright and pain, and started to run, dragging Frank with him. The latter had been startled by the unexpected action of the spy, but he held on to the reins with desperation and refused to be shaken off.

The spy drew a pistol from his belt and fired pointblank at Frank, the bullet grazing his ear. But he still hung on, and a moment later a score of his comrades had caught up to them and dragged the German from the horse's back.

He fought desperately, for he knew that he was fighting for his life, and considerable force was necessary to subdue him. He was a sadly battered object when at last he was half dragged,

half carried into the presence of the major and other officers.

The major looked at him, and his eyes had the glint of steel.

"So this is the way you play the game of war," he said, in tones of biting irony. "Is there anything to which your country will not stoop?"

The prisoner looked at him sullenly but made no reply.

"Take him away," the major directed. "A court-martial will attend to his case before sundown."

The man was marched off, accompanied by his orderly who had also been secured, and as he passed Tom he favored him with a glance that was full of venom and malignity.

The major turned to Tom.

"You have done well, Bradford," he said, "and you deserve the thanks of the regiment. Had that man's trick succeeded it might have led to a serious situation. I will see that your name is mentioned in the order of the day. You can return to your place."

Tom saluted and retired, and a murmur of approbation went up from the men as he passed them.

Quick orders passed down the line, for now that the trick had failed an enemy attack could be expected at any moment.

"Good stuff, Tom!" exclaimed Frank approvingly as he clapped his comrade on the shoulder. "You were Johnny-on-the-spot that time for fair."

"You were the real goods, old boy," agreed Billy. "My heart was in my mouth for fear you might have made a mistake. And it's mighty lucky that Frank had those reins, or the fellow might have got away after all."

"Not a chance," replied Frank lightly. "A dozen bullets would have got him anyway. The game was up with him the minute he had to take off his glove."

"It was a regular Hun trick," said Tom disdainfully.

"And he nearly got away with it," commented Billy. "He nearly had the major going. Why, he spoke English just as well as I do."

"That isn't saying much," chaffed Frank, and dodged the pass that Billy made at him.

"Well, he didn't put it over, and a miss is as good as a mile," remarked Tom.

"Did you see the look he shot at you as he went past?" said Billy. "If looks could kill you'd have died on the spot."

"There go the guns," interrupted Frank, as the enemy artillery opened up in chorus with a roar that shook the ground, and a storm of shells came shrieking toward them. "They're getting

ready to charge and the guns are laying down a barrage. We'll have another hack at them soon."

They crouched lower and clutched their rifles tightly. And while these fearless young Americans are waiting for the onset, it may be well, for the sake of those who have not read the preceding books in this series, to tell who Frank and his comrades were and what they had been doing up to the time our story opens.

Frank Sheldon was a stalwart young American who had been born and reared in Camport, a prosperous city of about twenty-five thousand inhabitants. He was a bright, likable fellow, a leader in athletic sports and a general favorite. Above all he was a hundred per cent. American. His father had died some years before our story opens, and Frank was the only son and support of his mother to whom he was devotedly attached. She was a French woman whom Mr. Sheldon had married while on a business visit to France. She was the heiress to a considerable estate left by her father, but on account of the war had not been able to go to France to claim the property, the settlement of which had been held up by some legal complications.

Frank had secured a good position with the firm of Moore and Thomas, and had excellent prospects for the future when the war broke out. His blood was on fire at once and he was eager

to enlist, although for a time he was held back because of his mother's dependence on him. An insult to the flag, however, which Frank promptly avenged by knocking down the guilty German, decided him, and he joined the old Thirty-seventh, the local regiment that had already seen service in other wars. With him enlisted his special chum, Bart Raymond, who was as ardent a patriot as Frank himself. Billy Waldon, another close friend, was already a member. Tom Bradford wanted to join, but was rejected on account of his teeth, though afterward he was accepted in the draft, and the four friends to their great delight found themselves together.

The only discordant element was Nick Rabig, born in America but of German parents, who had been with them in the same firm in Camport, and had made himself thoroughly disliked because of his bullying disposition and pro-German sentiments. He and Frank had been more than once on the point of blows, and finally, after Rabig had been caught in the draft and placed in the Thirty-seventh, Frank gave him the thrashing that he richly deserved.

How the Army Boys went through their period of training; how they sailed for Europe and narrowly escaped being torpedoed by a submarine, what exciting adventures they met with in their first contact with the enemy—these things

are told in the first volume of this series, entitled: "Army Boys in France; Or, From Training Camp to Trenches."

Once in the battle zone, thrilling experiences came thick and fast. The boys were not confined in their activities to the trenches, for the operations soon developed into open fighting. They were caught in a swirl of the fighting, pursued by Uhlan cavalry, compelled to leap from a broken bridge and finally captured by the Germans. From this captivity they were rescued by their aviator friend, Dick Lever, and carried back to their lines in his aeroplane. Frank had some encouraging news about his mother's property from a Colonel Pavet whose life he had saved on the battlefield. How rapidly the boys developed into veteran soldiers is told in the second volume of the series, entitled: "Army Boys in the French Trenches; Or, Hand to Hand Fights with the Enemy."

The great German drive was now preparing and the enemy in his first successes drove the Allies back and threatened to seize Paris and the Channel Ports. The old Thirty-seventh was thrown into the breach with the other American forces and did valiant work in holding the Germans back. Tom was captured and had a series of stirring adventures before he rejoined his comrades. Nick Rabig, who had been under suspi-

cion, from the start, was unmasked as a traitor. The boys had many hairbreadth escapes in desperate fighting, as will be seen from the third volume of the series, entitled: "Army Boys on the Firing Line; Or, Holding Back the German Drive."

The great counter-attack of Marshal Foch in July, 1918, put an end to the enemy attempt to advance and sealed the doom of Germany. After that time the Huns were steadily on the retreat, although they still put up some bitter battles. Frank and his comrades were in the front rank of the jubilant American army that was helping to drive the enemy back to the Rhine. In the battle of St. Mihiel, the Army Boys did their full share of the fighting. By an unfortunate chain of circumstances, Frank for a time seemed to be mixed up with the robbery of a paymaster's messenger, but he was triumphantly cleared of the charge and Nick Rabig was discovered to be the real culprit. The story of the part the Army Boys played in the beating of the Huns is narrated in the fourth volume of the series, entitled, "Army Boys in the Big Drive; Or, Smashing Forward to Victory."

The artillery fire that was searching out the American positions increased in intensity, and indicated that the attack when it did come would be a determined one.

"Fritz is sore," remarked Tom grimly.

"Yes," chuckled Billy, "he's peeved because his little game didn't work. He had it all framed up that he was going to get this position for nothing and now he finds he'll have to fight for it."

"It's going to be a lovely scrap," said Frank, peering through a chink in the log barricade that they had erected in consolidating their position. "I only wish that poor Bart could be here to share it with us. That boy would rather fight any time than eat."

"Maybe some of us will be with Bart sooner than he will be with us," muttered Tom, who, though he had the heart of a lion, was usually seeing the darker side of things.

Just then a shell came screaming through the air and dropped on the ground within ten feet of them.

"Duck!" cried Billy, and like a flash they all threw themselves flat on the ground, turning their helmets in the direction of the shell to give their heads as much protection as possible.

But the explosion they had nerved themselves to hear did not take place, and after a few seconds they raised their heads and looked curiously in its direction.

The shell lay harmlessly imbedded in the earth. From some defect, it had failed to explode.

The boys scrambled to their feet and looked rather sheepishly at each other.

"A dud!" exclaimed Tom in profound disgust and yet with a certain measure of relief.

"A false alarm," remarked Billy as he brushed the dirt from his uniform.

"It put one over on us that time for fair," admitted Frank, as he picked up his rifle. "But it's a good sign, fellows. It shows the Heinies are running short of good powder and they have to use an inferior brand. You can bet that there aren't very many of our shells that don't explode when they fall into their lines."

"Here they come," warned Billy. "Gee, but those lines are thick! They're putting all their eggs in one basket this time."

"The more that come the more to fall," muttered Frank, the light of battle coming into his eyes.

It seemed indeed as though the Germans were staking all the day's results on a single throw, for they were in much greater force than before and they fell on the American lines like an avalanche. It was a form of fighting in which they were especially proficient and against weaker fighters they might have prevailed. But the old Thirty-seventh and the regiments to the right and left of it had met these men before and beaten them, had beaten them that very day, had seen their backs, and in their hearts they knew that they were their masters.

So that when the attack came it beat upon granite. A withering fire from machine guns tore through their ranks, and then from the rifles of the Americans, many of whom wore marksmen's medals, leaped a sheet of flame that was the very blast of death.

The thick enemy lines wavered, broke and retreated. But under the urging and revolvers of their officers they formed again and came on only once more to be driven back with tremendous losses. This time they broke utterly and fled.

The American officers saw their opportunity and gave the order to charge. Over their log shelter with a cheer went the American boys, and pursued the beaten enemy, gathering up prisoners as they went along. The rout was complete, and only ended when the enemy reached and crossed a canal which was in their rear. They blew up the bridges after they had crossed and there for a time the American pursuit came to an end.

"Gee, but this has been some day!" panted Frank happily, after it was all over and the regiment was resting after its well-earned victory.

"This is the end of a perfect day," hummed Billy.

"The biggest day the old Thirty-seventh has had yet," declared Tom.

"There's just one thing lacking," said Frank, "and that is that Bart isn't with us. I'm going

to try to get leave the first thing in the morning and get over to the hospital."

Just then Corporal Wilson, whom they knew well, came up to them.

"Been to mess yet?" he asked.

"Sure thing," grinned Billy, "and what we did to that chow was a sin and a shame."

The corporal smiled.

"That's good," he said. "I'm looking for a few volunteers. And when I say volunteers you fellows know that the work I have in mind is dangerous, so dangerous in fact that I wouldn't feel justified in ordering men to do it."

All three sprang to their feet.

"Bring on your job," cried Frank.

"Trot it out," said Billy.

"Count me in," added Tom.

Warm approval shone in Wilson's eyes.

"I didn't think I'd have to look much farther," he said. "I've been on scouting trips with you fellows before and there's nobody I'd rather have at my back if it came to a scrap. Go and get your black scouting suits and blacken your faces too. It's going to be a black night but we can't take too many precautions. When you're ready, report to me and I'll give you your instructions. Of course I'm going with you."

He passed on and the boys looked at each other.

"Wonder what the corp has on his mind?" remarked Frank.

"Something risky you can bet," said Billy.

"Well, you have to hand it to Wilson," observed Tom. "You notice he said he was going with us. He doesn't ask any one to go where he won't go himself."

In a few minutes they had donned their scout suits and blackened their faces and reported to the corporal. They found him at his quarters dressed like themselves. By this time it was fully dark and time to start.

## CHAPTER III

### A BREATHLESS MOMENT

"We're going to try to cross that canal yonder," the corporal explained. "Headquarters wants to learn something about the disposition of the German forces. If what we find out suits our officers, they may throw pontoons across and attack. If you ask me how we're going to get across tonight, I tell you frankly I don't know. Perhaps we'll have to swim. We'll have to trust to luck and our own wits. Are you ready? Then come along."

He led the way and they trailed after him like so many shadows into the night.

There was no special reason for silence just yet, as the Army Boys followed their leader, for there were no Germans except wounded and prisoners left on this side of the canal, and they conversed freely among themselves, although instinctively in low tones.

"If Bart were only with us!" said Frank regretfully. "We've never yet gone on a trip of this kind that that boy hasn't been along."

"He'll be kicking himself for having missed it," prophesied Billy.

"There promises to be excitement enough in this to satisfy even Bart," added Tom.

They soon passed through the last line of sentries and reached the bank of the canal, or river, being partly natural and partly artificial. It was quite a wide watercourse and there was a fringe of trees that bordered it back of the towpath and the boys kept close in the shadow of these. But they no longer stood erect, for they feared that some light from the camp might form a background against which their figures could be seen. Down they went on hands and knees and crept along with the stealth of so many Indians out on a night foray.

Across the canal they could see a long and irregular glow which came from the dugouts and trenches where the Germans had established themselves. The line was at some distance from the canal itself, but they did not doubt that sentries were established along the whole bank on the lookout for just such a venture as the boys were engaged in.

"The corp was right in calling for volunteers," whispered Frank in Billy's ear.

"Looks to me like the riskiest thing we've been in yet," returned Billy.

"We'll have to do some classy swimming to get

over without making a splash," grunted Tom.

For half a mile or more they kept on down the canal, until they got beyond the zone of light and felt it safe to rise and emerge from the woods, cross the towpath, and reach the very edge of the bank.

In some places the bank went down straight into the water, and they could not drop in without making a noise. In others, however, it shelved somewhat, and these Wilson explored with the greatest care.

Suddenly he stopped and beckoned the boys to come nearer. They gathered about him.

"Look at this," he whispered, and they saw that he had his hand on the stern of a small boat that had been drawn in the shelter of a little arch at the side of the canal.

"Just what the doctor ordered," commented Frank, as he saw that the boat was big enough to carry four on a pinch and could faintly see the outline of a pair of oars lying across the thwarts.

"It beats swimming," murmured Tom.

"Get into it," ordered Wilson. "No, don't do that," he said hastily, as Billy was about to take up one of the oars. "I'm afraid they'll hear us if we use the oars. We'll just push it across with our hands. It's slower but it's safer."

They slipped into the boat as silently as ghosts, and dipping their hands in the water with the ut-

most caution began to propel the craft towards the further bank.

The boat was a homemade affair, probably built by some peasant, and was heavy and clumsy. Moreover, with the four it was forced low in the water and moved with difficulty. But there was plenty of time, for they had the greater part of the night before them.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the boat progressed. No shot greeted it, no hail from the shore told that it was discovered. The silence was almost uncanny.

On they went until at last the further bank loomed up before them. Soon they were near enough to touch it with their hands. But it was smooth and steep and they could not reach the top.

They worked their way along the wall, until finally they came to a place where several stones had fallen out, so that the holes left by them served as holds for their hands and feet. At a whispered command from the corporal, Frank worked his way up until his eyes were on a level with the top of the bank. There he stood and looked and listened with every faculty intent.

"Nothing stirring," he reported, as he let himself down again in the boat. "Either the Germans haven't strung their lines down this far or they're lying mighty low. I think it's worth tak-

ing a chance to land here. There's a patch of woods a hundred yards or so away, and if we can reach that we can take our bearings and decide on what we'll do next."

"All right," said the corporal after a moment's consideration. "I'll chance it on your judgment, Sheldon. We'll leave the boat here and Bradford with it."

Tom made a move to protest, but discipline asserted itself and he resigned himself without a word, although sorely disappointed at not being allowed to go on with the others.

"The hoot of an owl will be the signal," Wilson told him as they prepared to leave the boat. "When you hear that, give the answer so that we can find our way to where you are. Have the oars all ready, as we may have to leave in a hurry."

Tom nodded his understanding and the rest left him, dropping flat on the bank as soon as they reached the top and worming their way over the space that intervened between them and the patch of woods some distance beyond.

The strain on nerves and muscles was tremendous and it was with a sigh of relief that they reached the shelter of the woods. Here they could rise to their feet, although even this required the most extreme care. They were by no means assured that it was a friendly shelter.

It might contain machine gun nests or strong forces of the enemy.

Five minutes of the most intense silence and listening passed before they dared even to whisper to each other. Convinced at last that no one was close at hand, the boys drew near the corporal for his final instructions.

"We're certainly in luck so far," he breathed. "The only explanation of the failure to have sentries here is that they had no idea today that they were going to be driven back so far as to have to cross the canal. They came over helter-skelter and they've been so busy in blowing up bridges and getting their rattled forces together that other things have had to wait. But it's only a matter of time before they'll have guards set here, and we want to get back before that happens, if possible. Bring your watch hands close to mine and let's compare so as to see that we have the same time."

They did as directed, and the illumined faces of their radio watches showed that their time was practically the same.

"Five after ten," remarked the corporal. "That gives us two hours until midnight. At twelve o'clock sharp, wherever you happen to be, start back for the boat. You've each got a compass and you can come pretty close to the place, and the owl signal will do the rest. Find out what-

ever you can as to where the enemy has his battery positions, where he has gathered his greatest force, and where his wire entanglements are weakest. You've got your knives, and if I were you I'd depend on those if you find it necessary. Only use your revolver as a last resort, for if you have to fire the jig is up.

"Now we're going to spread out like a fan. Sheldon, you go off there to the left. Waldon will bear a little away from the canal bank toward the north, and I'll take the path between you two. I don't need to tell you that your life depends on your being careful. You know that as well as I do. Twelve o'clock sharp, mind. Good-bye and good luck."

Without another word they separated, gliding from tree to tree and gradually getting further apart, as they followed the general path that had been marked out for them.

Frank had not gone far before he had increasing evidence that he was approaching the main body of the enemy's troops. The light grew brighter that came from the hastily dug trenches of the enemy. Groups of men passed to and fro with lanterns, sometimes coming so close to the sheltering woods that he had to flatten himself in the bushes, scarcely daring to breathe until they had passed.

Reaching at last the edge of the forest, he rose

to his feet behind a huge tree and peered out. He could have shouted with delight, for he saw that he had happened upon a spot where the enemy was concentrating their heavy artillery. Great guns were being moved into position, emplacements for them were being hastily constructed, and he was able by the lanterns that flitted in and out among them like so many fire-flies to get a fairly accurate idea of their number and calibre. Here was information that would be more precious than gold to his officers. He could take no notes, but he went over the whole scene again and again in his mind, so that he should forget no detail.

So absorbed did he become in noting all that he thought might be of value to his officers that when a stream of light was thrown suddenly in his direction it struck him with almost the force of a blow.

He drew back like a flash and flattened himself against his side of the tree, making himself as small as possible.

After a minute or two he ventured to peer out. The light which came from a searchlight which was being tested by the enemy was darting about, now here, now there, but evidently without any special purpose in view, and his first fear that it had betrayed his hiding place subsided. But another apprehension took its place at once, for he

saw a man in an officer's uniform coming directly toward him.

Frank instinctively felt for his revolver, but he dismissed that thought before his hand touched the butt. With enemies swarming all about him, a shot at that moment would be little less than suicide. But his knife was still there, and his hand closed around its handle while his lips tightened with resolution.

The officer came on and Frank crouched for a spring in case he should be discovered. But to his great relief, the officer paused just before he reached the tree, drew a pipe from his pocket and lighted it. Then with a grunt of satisfaction he leaned up against the tree and puffed away, while he looked at the animated scene from which he had withdrawn for a few minutes of rest and relaxation.

The tobacco was vile, more like burning leaves than anything else, and as the clouds from the pipe enveloped Frank, he had all he could do to keep from coughing or sneezing. But he kept the impulse in check and waited with what patience he could command for the officer's next move.

The searchlight was flashing in another quarter now, for which Frank was devotedly thankful, but there was still too much light to make it safe for the young American to attempt to crawl

away. He glanced at his watch and saw that it was nearly midnight. The corporal and his chums would be waiting for him.

With infinite caution he peered around the side of the tree. Would that pipeful never be smoked out?

The officer had shifted his position somewhat, and Frank caught a glimpse of a paper protruding from an outside pocket of his coat. It looked like an official document of some kind. The thought came to Frank that it might contain some plans of the enemy for the next day's fighting.

It was a tremendous risk to attempt to get it, but Frank resolved to take the chance.

Drawing his knife and holding it ready for instant action, his other hand reached slowly around the tree and crept toward the officer's pocket.

# CHAPTER IV

## IN THE TUNNEL

SLOWLY, so slowly that it scarcely seemed to move, Frank's hand advanced until the fingers closed on the paper. Fortunately it protruded far enough for Frank to get a good grip on it.

If his hand had trembled, he would have been betrayed in an instant. But the experiences he had been through had steeled Frank's nerves and his muscles worked with the precision of a machine.

A fraction of an inch at a time, he drew the paper out until it was clear of the officer's pocket. Then he transferred it to his own. He had won. And he was jubilant.

Still, he was in imminent danger. At any moment the officer might discover his loss, think he had dropped the paper and begin to look around for it. That would be unlucky for Frank. But, the young soldier thought grimly, as he gripped his knife tightly, it might be still more unlucky for the officer.

The pipe was smoked out now. The officer

tapped it against the tree to knock the ashes out and seemed of two minds as to whether he should refill it. He finally decided that he had stayed there long enough, an opinion with which Frank heartily agreed, thrust his pipe in his pocket and started to walk away. Frank watched him with his heart in his mouth. Would he discover his loss?

The officer had gone about ten feet when Frank saw him give a sudden start. He uttered an exclamation in German and then felt hurriedly in all his pockets. Then he turned and began to retrace his steps slowly, his eyes glued to the ground.

"Now I'm in for it," thought Frank, as his muscles stiffened.

But the officer came no farther than the foot of the tree. That to his mind marked the limit of where the paper could possibly be. He dropped on his hands and knees and looked in the grass, but of course to no avail. Then he rose, brushed off his clothes and muttering harshly to himself he strode off in the direction of the camp, searching every foot of the way as he went along. There was a bad quarter of an hour in store for him when he should have to confess the loss of the paper to his superior officer.

Frank only waited until the officer was at a safe distance. Then he wound his way on his

hands and knees through underbrush until he was well beyond the zone of light of the camp. Only then did he rise to his feet and slipping from one tree to another hurried in the direction where his compass told him he would find the boat.

When he reached the line of trees that bordered the canal, he paused and gave the hoot of an owl. A moment later, there was an answering call that enabled him to locate the boat's position. He made his way to the bank and looking over saw the dark outline of the boat.

"Are you there, Tom?" he whispered.

"I'm here all right," came Tom's voice in answer. "Tumble in."

In a jiffy, Frank had let himself down in the boat and grasped his friend's hand.

"I'm mighty glad you're back," whispered Tom, in great relief. "I began to fear the Huns had got you. Any luck?"

"I got a pretty good line on some things that our officers want to know," replied Frank, "and I've got a paper in my pocket that may be worth something. The fellow that lost it seemed to think it was important, judging from the frantic way he was looking for it. You didn't think that your old friend would ever turn pickpocket, did you?"

He told his story in whispers, and Tom chuckled as he listened to it.

"Good work, old man," he murmured.

"But what's keeping Billy and the corporal?" asked Frank anxiously. "It's getting on toward one o'clock."

Just then the owl call came, and a moment later the corporal dropped cautiously down into the waiting boat.

"Anything doing?" was the first question he asked of Tom after greetings had been exchanged.

"Nothing much," answered Tom. "I heard a patrol going along the road about an hour ago, and later on I heard the stroke of oars. But it was too dark for me to see anything."

He had scarcely spoken when a volley of shots rang out. There were hoarse shouts and the sound of running feet. Then along came Billy, panting and breathless.

"The Huns!" he gasped, as he dropped into the boat. "They nearly got me and they're close behind. We'll have to make a quick get-away or they'll nab us."

"Quick!" ordered the corporal. "Sheldon, you take one oar and Bradford the other. Pull for the other side as fast as you can. Don't splash any more than you can help, or we'll be a mark for the Huns' bullets. Quick now!"

The boys needed no urging, for the sounds told them that their foe had almost reached the bank

of the canal. They bent to the oars and the boat shot away from the shore. But they had scarcely taken three strokes before a star shell rose from the enemy side of the canal and shed a greenish ghastly radiance over the scene. By its light, they saw a dozen or more Germans on the bank they had just left, and a volley of bullets that came singing over their heads and about the boat told them that they offered a good target.

But it was not this group of enemies that gave them the greatest concern. A more serious peril threatened them. For in that green flare of the star shell they saw two boats between them and the shore they sought. And the guttural shouts that had come from these boats at their discovery told the Americans that the occupants were Germans.

They grasped the situation at once. These were the boats whose oar strokes had been heard by Tom. There were half a dozen men in each boat and their errand on the American side had been the same as that of the Army Boys among the Germans.

It was a time for quick thinking, and the corporal was equal to the emergency. His party was outnumbered three to one by the men in the enemy boats, to say nothing of their comrades on the farther shore. The first star shell had faded, but others followed in quick succession, so that

there was no chance to slip between the enemy boats in the darkness.

"Turn her head upstream," ordered Wilson, and the boat swung round.

"Now, pull for your lives," the corporal commanded. "Our only chance is to get far enough ahead of those fellows to cut into the shore. When you fellows are tired, Waldon and I will take the oars. Pull, now, pull!"

Frank and Tom obeyed, putting every ounce of strength into their strokes, until it seemed as though the oars must snap. The boat sprang forward like a live thing, while the corporal and Billy, with their bodies concealed as much as possible, sent shot after shot from their revolvers at the men in the German boats.

The enemy had grasped the purpose of the turning upstream, and both boats raced on, trying to keep on a line with the Americans and prevent them turning in to shore. At the same time, the German patrol on the further bank ran along the shore with a constant crackling of rifle fire. Bullets whistled about the boat, some of them penetrating the side. One of them went through the corporal's sleeve, grazing his arm and bringing blood. Another knocked Tom's oar from his hand, but he recovered it in a desperate grab before it got out of reach, and the boat kept on with only a momentary lessening of its speed.

Suddenly Billy gave an exclamation of alarm as a dark wall of what appeared to be solid rock loomed up before them.

"Back water!" he shouted. "The boat will be smashed!"

"Go ahead," countermanded Wilson after a quick glance. "It's a tunnel. There's nothing to do but keep on. It kills our chance of getting to the shore. But on the other hand it's dark in there and we may be able to double on these fellows and give them the slip. Keep on."

The boat shot quickly into the blackness of the tunnel through which the canal flowed at that point. The bullets ceased to sing about them. The radiance of the star shells died away. Darkness enfolded them, a darkness so intense that they were absolutely hidden from each other. They rowed along for some distance with undiminished speed. Then as no sound of oars was heard in pursuit, the corporal gave the word to lay on the oars.

"Some race!" panted Frank as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"But we beat them to it!" gasped Tom. "Gee, I never worked so hard in my life!"

"They don't seem to be following us," commented Billy.

The corporal pulled out his flashlight and turned it around them. They were startled to

see how the stream had narrowed after entering the tunnel. There was barely room for two barges to pass each other.

The corporal's face was grave as he made the discovery.

"No chance of doubling on them in here," he remarked. "Looks very much as if they'd got us in a trap. If they follow us up, we'll have to fight it out. And we haven't got too much ammunition left. I sent most of my bullets at the Huns in the boats."

"You toppled over two of them," said Tom. "I saw them drop. But there's a lot of them left."

"There's a light at the mouth of the tunnel!" exclaimed Billy.

They looked back.

From the point that they had reached the tunnel extended back to its mouth as straight as an arrow, and they could see the two boats that had been in pursuit lying beside each other, while from the light of a lantern in the bow of one they could see the figures of the men engaged in an animated debate. They seemed to be divided as to the course to pursue.

"Wonder if they'll follow us in," murmured Tom.

"They don't seem to relish the idea very much," remarked Frank.

"The chances are that they will," judged the corporal. "They know that they outnumber us, and they won't want to let us go back to our lines with the information we've picked up."

Suddenly the light went out.

"I wonder what that means," said Billy anxiously.

"I think it means they're coming," replied the corporal. "They put the light out so that they won't offer a mark for our revolvers. It looks as though it might come to a battle in the dark."

"If it does, I'll match our eyes against theirs," remarked Frank confidently.

"We'll get at the oars again," said the corporal. "I don't know how long this tunnel is, but it must end somewhere. If we can reach the outlet and find no Germans there, we'll have a chance to get back to our lines by land. If not, we'll have to give these fellows a fight, no matter by how many they outnumber us. I only wish we had more ammunition. A few more shots and we'll be through."

"We've got our knives anyway," said Tom, "and Heinie hates knife fighting at close quarters."

"I've got a hand grenade," put in Frank. "I picked it up as we were coming away from camp, on the chance that it might come in handy in case we were discovered."

"Good work," said the corporal approvingly. "But now we'd better start. Waldon and I will take the oars, so as to give you other fellows a rest. Make as little noise as you can but work fast."

They bent to their work, quickened somewhat by the faint sound of oars which told them that the enemy was approaching.

# CHAPTER V

## A MASTER STROKE

With fresh arms at the oars, they hit up a rapid gait, which in that unknown passage was not without its dangers. The darkness was so intense that they could not see a foot ahead of them, and they dared not use the flashlight for fear it would betray their location to their pursuers.

"Let's hope this tunnel is straight all the way through," muttered Tom. "If there's a winding in it and we bring up against the sides it may send us all to kingdom come."

"Right you are," returned Frank, "but there's no help for it. We've got to take our chance."

He had scarcely gotten the words out of his mouth when what Tom had feared came to pass. The boat smashed head on into the rocky wall where the tunnel described a curve. There was a grinding of oars, a splintering of planks and a startled exclamation from the Army Boys.

Luckily Frank and Tom had been sitting in the stern of the boat, and, though they were badly

shaken, escaped the full force of the blow. Billy and the corporal were thrown from their seats into the bottom of the boat. The bow was smashed in, and a great jagged hole in the side opened the way for a flood of water that rushed in. In a moment the boat had sunk to the gunwales. Another moment and she had gone under the surface and the four occupants found themselves floundering in the water.

All were expert swimmers, and the ducking meant nothing in itself. But the loss of the boat might well mean the loss of their liberty or their lives.

They swam to the rocky side nearest them and clambered up on the bank. The path along the canal was a narrow one and the wall of the tunnel rose up perfectly smooth on the further side of it, affording no opportunity of concealment.

The corporal gathered them around him. It was time for quick thinking for the sound of oars had grown plainer and the enemy would soon be upon them.

"We'll have to run for it," Wilson whispered. "We ought to be able to keep ahead of them until we reach the other end of the tunnel. It would be easy enough if we could see where we were going, but we'll have to feel our way and make sure we don't tumble into the canal. We've got the chance that they may make the same mistake

that we did and smash into the canal wall. But then again they may know more about the way the canal runs and steer clear of it. Come along, now. I'll lead the way and you fellows keep close behind me."

They started off at as rapid a pace as they dared in the pitch blackness and soon had the satisfaction of noting that the sound of oars had grown fainter, thus indicating that they were outdistancing their pursuers.

They had kept this up for perhaps ten minutes when they caught sight of something that seemed like a star in the distance. But as they they drew nearer they saw that it was a fire that had been built on the canal bank, and soon they could detect the figures of men moving about it.

They stopped short for consultation.

"There's a patrol of some kind there," said the corporal, as he strained his eyes, "and it isn't likely that it's anybody we care to meet. Sheldon, your eyes are the best. See if you can make out those uniforms."

"I think they're Huns," judged Frank, after a moment's intense scrutiny. "But we'll have to get a trifle closer before I can be sure of it."

They moved a hundred feet closer and then conjecture gave way to certainty.

"No doubt about it," pronounced Frank. "They're Huns, as sure as shooting. And there

are twenty of them if there's one. They're right in our path and there's no getting around them."

It was grave news, and their pulses quickened as they recognized their peril.

The corporal pondered a moment before reaching a decision.

"We're between two fires," he said. "It would be suicide to go forward with our numbers and our scanty ammunition. With the fellows in the boats we've still got a chance. We'll have to double on our tracks and try to get past the boats. When we hear them coming close, we'll lie down flat on the path and trust to their passing us without seeing us. The only thing that will queer us will be if they happen to flash a light when they're abreast of us."

The young soldiers followed him as he turned and started on the return journey, listening as they went for tokens of the enemy's approach.

Soon the sound of oars grew distinct. The corporal gave a whispered command and they flattened themselves on the bank as far away from the edge as possible.

Nearer and nearer came the boat. They listened in vain for the second craft. It was evident that it was either far behind or perhaps had been left at the mouth of the tunnel to trap them when they should try to emerge.

Closer, still closer the boat came, and the Army

Boys lay like so many statues, holding their breath lest the slightest sound should betray them.

Now they knew that the boat was almost abreast, as they could hear the labored breathing of the men tugging at the oars.

But just then the leader of the Huns turned a flashlight in their direction, revealing the four figures. There was a shout, a sharp command in guttural tones, a dropping of oars and a click of rifles as the men raised them to their shoulders.

But quick as they were, Frank was quicker.

Lithe as a panther, he sprang to his feet and hurled the grenade that he had been holding in his hand full at the boat.

There was a blinding flash, a terrific explosion and the air was filled with flying bodies and debris. Frank himself was thrown to the ground by the shock, but scrambled to his feet again, none the worse except for a few bruises.

It was too dark to see the effects of the explosion, but the dead silence that followed told its own story. There was nothing more to be feared from that special group of enemies.

His own comrades gathered around Frank, themselves too dazed and shaken by the suddenness of the whole affair to understand fully just what had happened.

"What did it?" asked Billy.

"That was the grenade I was telling you fellows about a few minutes ago," replied Frank. "I thought of it again just when I dropped to the ground. I figured that I might have a chance to smash their boat with it, so I got it out and had it ready in my hand."

"Great stuff, Sheldon," said the corporal warmly. "It did the work all right. It's lucky we only had one boat to deal with. But now we've got to make tracks for the mouth of the tunnel."

"And we can't do it any too quick either," said Tom, as the sound of a commotion rose behind them. "Those fellows round that fire have heard that explosion and they'll be coming on the double quick to see what's up."

There was a growing din behind them that hastened their steps as they hurried along. Once, Billy going too near the edge nearly fell into the canal, from which he was saved by Tom's quick grab of his arm. At intervals the corporal used his flashlight on the narrow road ahead of him but he did not dare to do it very often, for fear that the light might be seen by Huns who might be lying in wait at the tunnel's mouth.

Soon they were conscious from the increasing freshness of the air that they were nearing the entrance. They slackened their steps a little, for the noise in the rear had died down. They did

not interpret this as meaning that their adversaries had given up the chase, but thought it more likely that they had halted at the scene of the explosion to try to fathom its meaning.

"Now," said the corporal, when they were within a few yards of the entrance, "I'm going to scout ahead and see whether that other boat is hanging about. If it isn't we'll have an easy time in swimming to the bank. If it is, we'll have some fighting before we win out."

He stole away like an Indian, but almost before the boys realized that he had gone he was back again.

"They're out there all right," he reported. "The boat is lying about twenty feet from the mouth. I couldn't see it, but I located it from some low talking that was going on. There's nothing to do but make a sudden dash, catch them unawares and get to the other side before they recover. Now here's how I figure we may do it," and he outlined his plan hurriedly while the young Army Boys listened intently.

"It sounds good," said Frank. "And there's another reason why we've got to do it anyway," he added, as a sound of hurrying feet behind them told them that the Hun patrol had again taken up the pursuit.

They followed the corporal to the tunnel's mouth. For an instant they stood there listen-

ing, until they had located the position of the boat.

"Now!" shouted Wilson.

Their revolvers spoke at the same moment and there were cries from the boat that told that the bullets had found a mark. Then they hurled their revolvers into the mass that the light of their shots had revealed, dived into the water, and struck out for the further side.

There was a wild commotion in the boat that had been so suddenly attacked. The inmates had been taken totally by surprise and the confusion was indescribable.

Those who had not been wounded and still retained their wits sprang to the oars and tried to turn the boat in the direction of the boys. Others seized their weapons and sent a scattering volley after the fugitives. But the shots were fired at random and went wild, although one or two struck the water uncomfortably close.

It was a case of surprise and audacity winning out against odds. All of the Americans could swim like fish, and as the distance to the shore was not great, it was only a matter of two or three minutes before they struck the bank and clambered up its sides. A moment more and they had crossed the path and reached the shelter of the trees on the further side. Only then did they pause to take breath.

"A close call," gasped Frank, as he shook the water from his face and hair.

"Closer than I care for," remarked the corporal, "but we've come off scot free, or at least I hope we have. Any of you fellows wounded?"

"Never touched me," grinned Billy.

"Same here," echoed Frank and Tom jubilantly.

"Good," said the corporal. "I think our officers will be satisfied with the night's work. We've got a lot of information, and we've accounted for quite a number of Huns while we were getting it. Now we'll go straight to headquarters."

There was no occasion for secrecy now, as they were in their own lines, and they made good time past the sentinels and to the section where the old Thirty-seventh lay. Their officers were poring over maps in earnest consultation, but Captain Baker and Major Willis came forward when the party appeared.

The corporal saluted and made his report. Then each of the Army Boys was questioned in turn as to his share in the night's events. The information they had gained was of marked value for the coming day's operations, but by far the greatest importance was given to the paper that Frank had so cleverly extracted from the German officer's pocket. A general laugh

went round when they heard the story of how it had been done, but amusement was soon lost in excitement as they scanned the paper.

"Why," exclaimed Major Willis, "it's a complete plan of the defenses of the Jager Brigade, the one that's right opposite our part of the line! The Germans would rather have lost a million dollars than to have had that paper fall into our hands."

"The beauty of it is," replied Captain Baker, "that they don't know we've got it. If they did, they'd change their plan. But it's ten to one they'll think it's lying around in their own lines somewhere and they'll just give the officer a reprimand for carelessness and let it go at that."

"You have done very well, Sheldon," said Major Willis, turning to Frank. "It was an excellent piece of work. The names of all of you will be mentioned in the order of the day and there may be other rewards in store for you. You made no mistake, Corporal, in picking out your men," he continued, turning to Wilson. "You were fortunate in your helpers and they were worthy of their leader. You may go now."

They saluted and retired, tired and almost exhausted with the strain they had been under, but happy in the commendation of their officers and the consciousness that they had played their part well.

"There's just one thing lacking," said Frank, as they were getting ready to turn in, "and that is that poor Bart wasn't along."

"Good old Bart," said Billy regretfully. "How he would have enjoyed that scrapping. He'll feel cheated when he hears of it."

"That boy would rather fight than eat," was Tom's tribute to their absent friend. "I'd give a lot to know just how he's getting along with that broken head of his."

"We'll go over to the hospital the first thing in the morning and find out," said Frank, as he rolled himself in his blankets.

# CHAPTER VI

## COLONEL PAVET RETURNS

BUT when the morning came, there was no chance to make the intended visit, for the regiment was shifting its position in preparation for an attack on the enemy lines. Orders were flying thick and fast, orderlies were riding from one division to another, and it was evident that a great battle was impending. Artillery was being brought up from the rear, for the army had gone ahead so fast on the preceding day that they had outdistanced their guns. Tanks, too, were massing in great numbers on the front.

As one of the great monsters was lumbering by where the boys were stationed, something went wrong with the machinery and the driver stepped out to adjust it. An exclamation of delight broke from the Army Boys, as they recognized the bronzed face of their old friend, Will Stone.

His pleasure at the meeting was just as great, and his face was beaming as he came over to them with outstretched hands.

"What good wind blew you up this way?" asked Frank, after the first greetings were over.

"Been ordered up here to help you fellows clean out the Argonne forest," answered Stone with a grin. "Some job, too, if all I hear about the place is true."

"It's a big job, sure enough," admitted Frank.

"Oh, well, we've turned the trick whenever we tackled the Huns so far, and I guess we're not going to fall down on this," said Billy.

"Where's Bart?" asked Stone, as he glanced about him. "I hope nothing's happened to him."

"Nothing fatal, we hope," responded Frank soberly. "He hit his head against a stump, in a charge we were making yesterday morning, and cut it badly. They took him off to the hospital and we were figuring on going over today and seeing how he was getting along. But I'm afraid we can't get off if we're going to attack."

"Too bad," said Stone sympathetically, "but I don't think we need to figure on an attack today. They won't be able to get things in readiness before night. I was tipped off a little while ago that the fight was going to start tomorrow morning at dawn. So you may be able to see Bart today. If you do, tell him I was asking about him and that I'm rooting for him to get well. But I'll have to tinker up this machine of mine and be getting along."

With a cordial wave of the hand he left them, and after adjusting the machinery started off to reach his appointed part of the line.

"He's a bully good fellow," remarked Frank admiringly, as they gazed after him.

"You bet he is," agreed Tom.

Stone's prophecy proved to be correct, for late that afternoon it was announced that the attack would take place on the following morning. The men were released from standing in readiness and the Army Boys had no difficulty in getting permission to visit their comrade.

But the hopes they had cherished of finding Bart better were doomed to disappointment. They were taken by the Red Cross nurse into the ward in which he lay, his face flushed with fever, his hands clenching and unclenching, while incoherent mutterings came from his lips. It wrung their hearts to see their chum in such a plight.

"What does the doctor say about him?" Frank asked the nurse anxiously.

"He says that the case is very serious," was the reply. "He fears that it may develop into brain fever. He said this morning that if it were not for the splendid vitality of the patient, he wouldn't have a chance. As it is, he hopes he may pull him through."

The boys were shocked by this verdict. They had been through so many adventures with Bart,

he had been such a loyal and dependable comrade, that it seemed as though he had become a part of themselves. Army life without Bart with them seemed almost unthinkable.

"Of course," the nurse hastened to reassure them, as she saw their clouded faces, "it may not prove as serious as the doctor fears. It will be a day or two before he can predict with some degree of certainty."

There was nothing to do but hope, and the boys left the hospital with downcast faces and heavy hearts. They knew that they were carrying a burden that would not be lightened until Bart was once more at their side.

On their way back, they passed a prison pen where a large number of Germans captured in the previous day's fighting were confined. Most of these were out in the open, but there were some small structures in the enclosure where those who were charged with serious offenses were imprisoned under guard of sentries who were pacing up and down before the huts.

"There's Fred Anderson," remarked Tom.

"Hello, Fred," called out Billy.

"How are you, Billy?" responded Fred, coming to a pause as they drew near. "I see you fellows are coming from the hospital. Been over to see Bart, I suppose. How's the old scout getting along?"

"He's in a bad fix," responded Frank sadly. "The doctor doesn't know whether he'll pull through or not."

"That's too bad," said Fred with genuine regret, for Bart was a general favorite with the members of the Thirty-seventh. "I hope he'll come around all right."

"We all hope that," responded Billy. "All the boys of the old regiment will be rooting for him. How comes it that you're on sentry duty, Fred?"

"Just my hard luck," grumbled Fred. "Whom do you think I'm guarding in here?"

"Oh, some old Hun, I suppose, with an unpronounceable name," said Billy carelessly.

"Bad guess," grinned Fred. "It's Nick Rabig."

The name acted like an electric shock on the three comrades.

"Rabig!" they exclaimed in the same breath.

"That's what," said Fred. "Seems to be popular with you fellows, I don't think."

"The yellow dog!" exclaimed Billy.

"The traitor!" growled Frank.

"Why haven't they settled his case long ago?" gritted Tom. "He ought to have been stood up before a firing squad the day after they captured him the last time."

"That's what he deserved all right," agreed Fred. "He's the only fellow that ever disgraced

the colors of the old Thirty-seventh. The fact is, I suppose, that we've been so busy chasing the Huns out of France that a court-martial hasn't had time to attend to his case. But it's a dead open and shut case and he'll get his all right when the time comes."

"It's a long time coming," grumbled Tom, who, as our readers will remember, had especial cause to despise the man whom he had caught in the very act of dealing with the enemy.

"Well, so long, old man," said Frank, as the friends prepared to go on their way. "Sorry you got stuck with guard duty. Hope your time's nearly up."

"I've got half an hour at it yet," replied Fred, as he consulted his wrist watch and shouldered his rifle. "I'll be back with you then, if a Hun shell doesn't get me. Their batteries have been trying to get our range, and they're getting uncomfortably close with their high explosives. We'll have to move our prisoners farther back if they keep it up much longer."

"Here comes a shell now," exclaimed Frank, who had learned by long experience to tell from the whining of a shell just about where it was going to land. "Down, fellows, quick!"

They dropped flat on the ground and none too soon to escape a huge shell that flew over their heads and exploded just beyond.

But if it had missed them, another had not been so fortunate. The shell had struck the hut that Fred had been guarding and reduced it to atoms. It had missed Fred himself by only a matter of feet, and as he had followed the example of his friends and thrown himself to the ground he was unharmed.

As the boys rose to their feet and looked around them, they saw what had happened and ran to the remains of the hut. They looked inside and then turned away. That one glance had been enough to tell them what had become of Rabig. He had gone to his last account, and there was no further need of any earthly court to judge his deeds and fix his punishment.

"And it was the very people to whom he sold out that killed him," mused Frank, as the remains of the dead traitor were gathered up to be taken away for burial.

There was no sense of exultation in their hearts, only a feeling that in a singular way justice had been done to a man who had committed the unpardonable crime of betraying his country.

They had been to mess that evening, and were talking over the events of the day, when an orderly came to say that Frank was wanted at headquarters.

Wondering somewhat what the summons might mean, and pursued by the chaff of his

friends, who predicted all sorts of dire things in store for him, Frank obeyed the summons, and was surprised and pleased to find Colonel Pavet waiting to see him. The pleasure was felt also by the colonel, as was shown by the warmth of his greeting.

Each owed a great deal to the other. Frank, as my old readers will remember, had saved the colonel's life when the latter was lying wounded on the battlefield and had carried him off to safety amid a storm of bullets. The colonel, on the other hand, had been kindness itself in looking after the interest of Frank's mother in property that had been left to her in France.

"Ah, Monsieur Sheldon, how glad I am to see you again," said Colonel Pavet.

"No more than I am to see you, sir," returned Frank, shaking the hand which the colonel in sheer disregard of the difference in rank had extended to him. "I hope that you are well."

"Perfectly well, I thank you," replied the colonel, "and happy beyond expression at the way things are going. It will not be long now before the arrogant Huns will be driven from France. Oh, what we Frenchmen owe to you brave Americans! You are like the Crusaders of old. You came to our aid when our backs were against the wall and you gave us fresh courage, new life."

"Just as your people did for America more than a hundred years ago," replied Frank. "You don't owe us anything, Colonel. We've simply been paying a debt."

"But paying it with interest a hundred fold," protested the colonel warmly. "But tell me how things are going with you, *mon cher ami.*"

"Oh, the same as usual," returned Frank. "The Hun bullets haven't got me yet."

"But that isn't because you haven't been where the Hun bullets were," smiled the colonel. "I've been hearing of what you did on that scouting expedition last night. It's a marvel that you came through it alive. But fortune favors the brave."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Frank, who always felt uncomfortable when anyone referred to his exploits.

"Your officers think differently," laughed the colonel. "But now to other matters. In the first place, I want to tell you how sorry I was that I was away when that unfortunate accusation was laid against you. A word from me would have shown its falsity at once."

"I know it would," answered Frank, "but luckily things took such a turn that I was soon cleared of that charge."

"The next thing is," went on the colonel in a tone of regret, "that some complications have de-

veloped in the matter of your mother's property."

Frank felt his heart sink. It was only a little while since he had written her, telling her that everything was practically settled in her favor, and that all she would have to do after the war ended would be to take possession.

"I'm sorry to hear that," he replied. "I thought that the dying confession of that rascally butler had established her claim beyond a doubt."

"It did as far as the attempt to defraud her was concerned," answered the colonel. "This is a technical matter bearing on the title to a part of the estate. It seems that some legal formalities were overlooked at the time of its acquisition. My brother Andre explained it to me in his last letter. But I am only a plain soldier and I could not quite grasp the details. Now, don't let it worry you, for Andre thinks that the matter can be attended to and the title made perfect. Only it will take some time and I thought I ought to notify you just how matters stood."

"It's very good of you," replied Frank, relieved to learn that the fears he had formed when the colonel first began to speak of the matter might be groundless. "Of course I'm sorry that there's any hitch at all, but if it can be remedied it doesn't matter so much."

"Right," agreed Colonel Pavet, "and if I might be permitted to suggest, I would say

nothing to your mother about it at present. If it were anything really serious, of course she ought to know. But under the circumstances it would only cost her needless worry. Now I must be going. Of course you know or have guessed that there will be a great battle tomorrow."

"I have heard that we attack at dawn," replied Frank.

"Yes," confirmed the colonel. "To you Americans has been assigned the task of clearing out the Argonne Forest. It is one of the most tremendous tasks of the war but I know you will be equal to it. My own regiment is with Gouraud's forces on your left. We will probably effect a juncture with your forces after you have taken the forest, and the two armies will have a friendly race to see which gets to Sedan first. The luck of battle may bring us together again before long."

"I hope so," smiled Frank, "and when we do meet I hope that we can congratulate each other on the complete defeat of the Huns."

"We will," replied the colonel with conviction. "Their lines are bending now and are ready to break. One more great effort and the work is done. The Allied armies will spend Christmas on the Rhine."

"I hope you are as good a prophet as you are

a fighter," laughed Frank. "But I believe in my soul you're right."

"I'm sure of it," replied the colonel. "And now I must go. Remember me to your mother when you write."

They shook hands and separated, the colonel mounting his horse which stood at the door, and Frank with a final wave of the hand returning to his comrades.

His sleep that night was as sound as though the next day were to be a holiday, instead of marking the beginning of one of the most desperate battles of the war.

The reveille sounded while it was yet dark on the following morning, and before the first faint streak of dawn appeared in the eastern sky the old Thirty-seventh was in line waiting for the word to advance.

Before them in the semi-darkness loomed up the gigantic shapes of the tanks that were to lead the way and smash the barriers that the foe had erected during the four years that they had held the forest.

Thousands of men who were too old for military service had been employed there in building concrete fortifications, bombproof shelters and underground passages leading from one trench to another until the whole forest was a perfect labyrinth from which the Germans would have

to be driven foot by foot and trench by trench. There were "pill boxes" by the hundred set up in concealed locations that commanded the entire territory. Snipers were in the lofty trees and machine gun nests existed by thousands. There were deep pits into which the unwary might fall. Barbed wire entanglements added to the natural difficulties of the position. Deep gulches and ravines made it impossible for the troops to advance in any kind of regular formations, and in places there was only room for them to go in single file over ground swept by enemy bullets. Their heaviest batteries had been brought from other portions of the line and concentrated there.

It was the Germans' last stand. If they failed to hold the Americans, their cause was lost. Back of the forest was the railway line that ran from Longuyon to Mezieres and Sedan. It was their chief artery of supplies for all their armies in France and Belgium. If the Americans once got astride of that railway, the Germans would be bottled up with no way of escape except through the gateway of Liege.

Orders had gone out from the German High Command that the forest must be held at any cost, and their crack divisions of the Jagers and the Prussian Guards had been brought up with orders to die at their posts rather than retreat or surrender. They had all the advantage of posi-

tion. They boasted that the forest could never be taken. Even the Americans whom the Huns had first learned to respect and afterward to fear, could not, it was said, do what was beyond the power of mortal men. It was simply impossible. Had not the great Napoleon himself declined to attack the enemy who held the forest in his day, saying that it was impregnable?

But the American troops had learned to laugh at the word "impossible." They wouldn't admit that it was in their dictionary. They had been told that their green troops could not hold the Germans at the Marne, but they had held them. They had been told that it was impossible to break the Hindenburg line, but they had smashed it to bits. They had been told that the St. Mihiel salient could not be pinched out, but they did in two days what others had failed to do in four years. Now, when they heard that it was impossible to clear the Argonne Forest, they simply grinned. It was only a German joke.

"Wonder when the music will begin," said Frank, as he crouched beside Tom and Billy, waiting for the thunder of the great guns to signal the beginning of the attack.

"It won't be long now," replied Tom, as he cast his eyes up to the sky where a faint light was beginning to diffuse itself.

"I wonder if Stone is with this bunch of tanks in front of us," remarked Billy.

"I'd know his tank if I saw it, but it's a little too dark yet to make it out," said Frank, as his eye ran along the silent row of monsters that stretched up and down the line. "But one thing's certain, if he isn't in the front row at the start, it won't be long before he gets there."

Men passed along the line with steaming buckets of coffee, for the morning was chilly, and the boys swallowed their portions with gusto and passed the tins back for more.

"Gee, but that tastes good," said Tom, smacking his lips. "It warms me to the toes."

"You'll get exercise enough to keep you warm before many minutes are past," prophesied Billy.

"It can't come too soon," put in Frank, as his fingers tightened over the stock of his rifle.

Just then the word came down the line:

"Fix bayonets!"

## CHAPTER VII

### AT GRIPS WITH DEATH

THERE was a series of clicks as the bayonets slipped in their sockets.

"In less than five minutes now!" muttered Tom.

Suddenly the great American guns opened up with a roar that sounded as though the earth had split asunder. There was a deeper bass note than usual that the Army Boys' trained ears detected in an instant.

"Those must be the naval guns we've been hearing so much about," said Frank to Billy.

"That's what," replied Billy, "and they're some guns, too. I hear that they throw nearly a ton of metal a distance of sixteen miles. They're the biggest guns that have ever been used in battle, and they spell hard luck for the Heinies."

"I wonder how we're going to get across this canal," pondered Tom, as they waited for the word to charge.

"Our engineers will have seen to that," said Frank confidently. "Trust those boys to be on

the job. Maybe it will be rafts, maybe pontoons. You remember how we got across the Meuse the other time. At the worst we can swim it."

But as it grew lighter with each succeeding minute, they saw that they would not have to swim. During the night, the engineers had assembled a string of barges which they had laid beside each other and covered with planking. The work had been done under fire and the losses had been heavy, but the engineers were of the same plucky type as those who had dropped their picks and shovels and gone into the fight at Cambrai, and those others who had helped Carey to stop the gap on the road to Amiens. They had stuck to their job until their work was done, and several such bridges were now ready for use at different points along the American line.

"Stand ready," came the command that thrilled the Army Boys from head to foot.

"Charge!"

With a rousing cheer the line swept forward, and the greatest battle of the war was on.

The American guns laid down a barrage, a veritable curtain of fire that went before their men and kept lifting as the line advanced so as not to kill their own men. The Americans were so eager to get forward that this was an ever present danger, and many lives had been lost in the earlier battles of the war from this cause.

But now the men were veterans, and while they were just as full of ardor and eagerness as ever, they had learned not to throw their lives away by being over rash.

A hail of fire came from the German guns as the first detachments reached the bridges and began to cross. Great lanes were torn in the American ranks, but they closed up at once like the water in the wake of a ship.

The tanks went first, and though the floating bridges swayed beneath their weight they were soon safely on the other side of the canal. After they had reached the bank, they halted for the infantry to come up and form rank in the shelter of their armored sides. The bullets rattled against them until the din was like that of a boiler factory. Two of them were struck by monster shells that put them out of action, but the majority of them came through the storm of fire without material damage.

In the meantime, the first detachments of infantry had crossed the bridges, although their losses were heavy and the planks of the bridge were red. Some had been swept into the canal and the water was dotted with bodies, some motionless, while others, who were only wounded, sought to swim to the nearer shore or were rescued by American boats that put out into the stream.

The old Thirty-seventh had been given the post of honor in their section of the line and the Army Boys were in the first rank. A bullet clipped off a lock of Billy's hair just above the ear, and one had pierced the sleeve of Frank's arm, blistering the skin as it went along as though it had been seared by a hot iron. But the lads were so full of the spirit of the fight that they scarcely noticed these trifles when they brought up breathless on the further side.

"So far so good," gasped Frank, as he and his comrades halted to draw breath in the shelter of a great tank.

"Talk about hundred yard dashes!" exclaimed Billy. "I'll bet we came near beating the record for crossing bridges."

"I don't know," grinned Tom, as he took off his helmet to wipe his forehead. "I think we beat it that time when we scurried over the broken bridge like jack rabbits with the Uhlan cavalry only a dozen jumps in the rear. But we're lucky this time as we were then, and we've come through with scarcely a scratch."

"Knock wood," warned Billy. "This is only the curtain raiser. The real play is yet to come."

In less than an hour, sufficient forces had crossed the bridges to justify the officers in ordering an advance against the first line of the enemy trenches that had been established just

within the edge of the forest. The trenches were heavily manned and bristled with field and machine guns, while back of them in the grim and forbidding forest stretched other lines of defense that the boys knew would cost thousands of American lives to take. But the job was there and had to be done. And they vowed in their hearts that it should be done.

The huge tanks lined up for the attack and got once more in action. Into the woods they went, crushing down trees as though they were pipe stems, lurching into and out of shell craters, tearing into the barbed wire entanglements, plucking up the posts to which they were fastened and opening huge gaps into which came pouring the long lines of shouting, cheering men. Like an avalanche they struck the trenches, and the Germans poured out to meet them.

The opposing lines swayed back and forth like gladiators in a death grip. Then they broke up into hundreds of battling groups, a dozen men here, twenty there, struggling with bayonets and rifle butts, hacking, stabbing and at times throwing their empty guns aside and fighting with knives and even with fists. It was the kind of close-in fighting in which the Americans excelled and which they always sought when the plan of battle made it possible.

Frank, Tom and Billy fought as closely in

company as they could, and many a blow had been warded off by one of the three from the others that would otherwise have found its mark.

For a long time the battle seemed to be fairly even, for the Germans fought with the fury of desperation and were constantly reinforced from heavy divisions kept in reserve. Each side attached especial importance to this first stage of the fight, because of the influence it might have on the morale of their men. The side that lost in the first phase of the battle would be depressed, while the side that won would be correspondingly elated and strengthened in spirit for the struggles that were yet to come.

But American blood and American fighting qualities were not to be denied. Gradually the Germans were pressed back, but as they retreated they kept up a stubborn resistance by means of machine gun nests posted in every conceivable place, at every turn in the forest paths, in clumps of bushes, in forks of trees. They made the Americans pay dearly for every foot of ground that they gained.

But the Americans had learned by long experience not to advance in mass formation against these messengers of death. They spread out in units and in groups, worming their way through the bushes, seeking the shelter of every rock and tree and shell hole.

In following up this method of fighting, the three Army Boys were separated. Frank found himself in a shell hole alone. He peered over the edge and could see nothing of Tom and Billy. He crouched low in the hole, reloading his rifle. Then he took stock of his position.

About three hundred feet ahead of him was a machine gun nest that was spitting bullets in a steady stream. It was sheltered by a barricade of logs about four feet high. Behind this the German machine gunners were snugly ensconced and seemed to defy capture. They kept slewing their gun from side to side of the barricade so that it commanded the whole front of the position, and their bullets went hissing over the open space like so many snakes and quite as deadly.

Frank pondered as to what he should do and a wild thought came into his mind. At least it would have seemed wild at the beginning of his experience in the war. But he had taken so many risks and gotten away with them that he had grown inclined to trust his luck.

He was going to put that particular machine gun out of business. But how could he do it single-handed?

They could fire a hundred bullets to his one.

His keen eye studied the ground in front of him.

There were perhaps half a dozen shell holes

between him and the barricade. But they were too far apart for him to slip from one to another without being seen. And to be seen in that bullet swept place meant certain death.

But he also noted another thing. A heavy German field gun from a distance of miles behind the lines was sending huge shells that were falling with tolerable regularity in the space between him and the barricade. Every minute or two, a shell would explode with a tremendous roar, sending a volume of black smoke and tons of dirt into the air.

Here was the solution of Frank's problem.

He measured the distance between him and the next shell hole, and poised himself for a spring when the next shell should fall.

It came, and on the instant Frank was out of his hole and rushing toward the next behind the screen of smoke and dirt. He dropped into it and waited for the next shell. Several times this was repeated, until at last Frank found himself in the last shell hole less than fifty feet away from the barricade. This was his limit of possible shelter. The rest of the way he must be in the open.

He crouched low in the hole, waiting for a favorable moment. Just at that time bullets were whistling directly above his head. But he had noted that the gunners were sweeping their gun

about in a semicircle, so as to command all portions of the open space, and he knew that in a moment or two the line of fire would be on one side or the other of the direct line that lay between him and the barricade.

How many men there might be in the machine gun crew he did not know. There would surely be two, perhaps half a dozen. He did not greatly care. In that moment of intense exaltation he would have fought a regiment.

The bullets ceased to sing above his head. He peered cautiously above the edge of the hole. The wicked looking muzzle of the machine gun was pointing considerably to his left.

He leaped from the hole and raced for the barricade.

There was a startled shout and a frantic effort to slew the gun around. The next instant Frank sprang high in the air, struck the topmost log of the barricade with both feet and sent it tumbling down upon the machine gun crew while he went down with it.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PUTTING IT OVER

THERE was a wild scrambling and confusion in the machine gun nest, as the log came down, followed by Frank.

The latter lost his balance and went down on all fours, but was on his feet again in a second.

The log had struck one of the crew in falling and knocked him unconscious. But his companion in serving the gun had risen to his feet at the same moment with Frank and had drawn his revolver to fire. Frank had no time to raise his rifle, but quick as lightning he swung it from the level of his waist against the upraised arm of his opponent. There was a sharp crack that told that the bone was broken, and the man sank to the ground with a groan.

Frank heard a shout just behind him and wheeled about. A helmeted head was emerging from a trench that had been dug in the rear of the machine gun, and in this a squad of Germans had been stationed to support the crew.

Frank's rifle spoke, and the German sank back

with a bullet through his shoulder. Two jumps carried Frank to the head of the trench, where he saw seven Huns, who had evidently been rattled by the fall of their leader and were hesitating, not knowing how many enemies might be waiting for them on the ground above.

Frank covered them with his rifle, whose muzzle darted from one to the other in the line.

"Hands up!" he commanded.

The words were American, but the Germans understood what it meant. If they had any doubt, the rifle would have enlightened them.

Their guns dropped from their hands and they raised the latter above their heads.

"*Kamerad!*" they shouted in chorus.

Still keeping them covered, Frank motioned them to come out one at a time. They did so and formed in line, their hands still upraised. The look of amazement on their faces, when they looked around for Frank's comrades and failed to see them, was comical beyond expression. But Frank was too keyed up at that moment to pay any attention to the humorous side of it.

He shot a glance at the machine gun. It had been knocked down by the falling log and the machinery by which it was fed with cartridges was unusable.

"March!" Frank commanded, taking his station in the rear of the line of prisoners.

They obeyed sheepishly enough, and one or two of them in the rear of the line were inclined to be sullen, but a sharp jab of Frank's bayonet decided them, and they went off at a jog trot toward the American lines.

They had covered perhaps two-thirds of the way, when Frank met a squad of his own regiment who were advancing after clearing out a ravine. They raised a shout as they saw Frank coming along herding his flock, and in a moment he was surrounded and overwhelmed with eager questions.

"Where are the rest of the fellows that helped you take this bunch?" asked Corporal Wilson, who was in command of the squad.

"There weren't any others," answered Frank. "I just happened to get the draw on this crowd and gathered them in."

"'Happened' is good," said Wilson dryly. "There's more to it than that. You'll have to tell us about it later. In the meantime, I'll have these fellows sent to the rear."

The prisoners were sent back, and Frank went forward with his comrades for further fighting. Under other circumstances, he would have liked to rest for a while, for he had been under a terrific strain and now he was feeling the reaction. But there was stern work yet to be done, and the resting time could come later.

Tom and Billy had worked their way in his direction and now rejoined him. They moved forward and soon reached the scene of Frank's exploit. The German who had been knocked unconscious had evidently come to his senses and had disappeared, but the two men whom Frank had wounded were still there. A stretcher party working in that part of the field was signaled, and the men were taken away to the hospital.

"Some classy work!" exclaimed Billy, when at his eager urging Frank had told to him and Tom the incidents of the fight. "If you don't get the Distinguished Service Cross for this, there's no gratitude in the United States army."

"Billy's right," declared Tom, as he clapped Frank on the shoulder. "There isn't one man in a thousand who would have thought of it or done it if he had thought of it. Frank, old man, you're a wonder."

"Oh, forget it," said Frank. "I had a chance and took it. That's all."

"That's all," mimicked Tom. "You had a chance and took it. We'll let it go at that."

All that morning the fighting continued, and the Germans were steadily driven back. By noon the edge of the forest had been cleared, and the Americans began to consolidate their lines in preparation for the next advance.

"Well, we've won the first round anyway,"

remarked Billy jubilantly, as the Army Boys gathered in a trench that had been hastily constructed and sat down to eat.

"Yes," admitted Tom, "but there may be a good many rounds to this fight. Heinie's got lots of fight in him yet and don't you forget it. He knows he's in the last ditch and that if he doesn't stand here, it's all up with him."

"Quit your croaking," admonished Billy. "We've got the Indian sign on him and he knows it. This last ditch business doesn't go with the Huns. They're all right when they're winning, but they can't stand losing. They don't want their cities devastated in the same way that they've ruined the cities of France and Belgium. When the time comes they'll cave in. You just wait and see what kind of a prophet little Billy is."

"I think you're both right," said Frank. "I agree with Tom that we're due for one big fight before Heinie will admit defeat. But I also think with Billy that when that defeat comes they'll curl up and quit so quickly it will make your head swim. But what's the use of our chinning about it and letting our chow get cold? All we've got to do is to fight. We'll leave it to Pershing and Foch and the other men at the head of things to settle things with the Germans after we've licked them to a frazzle."

They attacked their meal with an appetite sharpened by the strenuous work of the morning, and then at the call of the bugle they again took their place in the line to finish the work they had so well begun.

From that time on, the work was more like guerrilla fighting than any battle in which they had engaged so far. The woods were so thick and the obstructions so many that it was impossible to advance in anything like regular formation. Instead of tens of thousands of men being hurled against other ten thousands in a mass attack, both armies were broken up into countless groups of ten, twenty and a hundred men, each following a general plan of advance but depending upon circumstances and natural conditions as to the way they carried out that plan.

The Germans had the advantage of a greater familiarity with the ground, which they had held for years, and also in their tremendously strong system of defenses. But the Americans had against these the consciousness that they had beaten this enemy in every fight where they had met them, and the feeling that they could always beat them. Then, too, the Americans were more accustomed to act on their own responsibility. If their officers were killed or wounded, they figured out for themselves what was the best thing to do and went ahead and did it. In a certain

sense, every private was a general when he had to be. The Germans, on the other hand, were excellent fighters in the mass. But they needed to have their shoulders touching those of their comrades, and they had been taught to rely so utterly upon the directions of their officers that they felt lost and bewildered when they had to make decisions for themselves. Of course there were exceptions, but this fairly expressed the difference between the two armies.

Not only that day but for many days thereafter the fighting kept on. The Americans had given themselves two weeks to clear the forest. Day by day the lines advanced, sometimes slowly, again more quickly, but they always advanced, and every nightfall found them nearer their goal than they had been the day before.

The Army Boys were in their element. Here at last was enough fighting to suit even their hot blood. The only thing lacking to their satisfaction was the absence of Bart.

They had not yet even been able to hear from him, as they were kept so busy and the lines shifted so constantly that all communication between them and the hospital was cut off.

"It's hard luck for the old scout," remarked Tom one night after the regiment had cleared out an intricate system of dugouts and was resting after the day's work.

"He'll be sore as the mischief if this war ends without his getting another crack at the Huns," said Billy.

"He needn't worry," put in Frank, "he's done his full share if he never fires another shot. All I want is to see him on his feet again, sound and well, whether the war ends before that time or not. In the meantime we three must try to do the work of four."

"Yes," agreed Tom, "every fourth shot we fire, we'll say to ourselves: 'There goes one for Bart!' "

# CHAPTER IX

## THE SHINING PLANE

After one day of particularly grim and stubborn fighting, the Army Boys found themselves quartered in an unusually large clearing in the dense woods and underbrush that went to compose the Argonne Forest. Since early morning they had been engaged in clearing out trench after trench of Boches, menaced on every side by skillfully concealed machine gun nests, but making steady progress, in the face of almost insuperable obstacles. A number of their comrades had fallen, but not one of our heroes had suffered anything worse than the deep scratches resulting from forcing their way through innumerable barbed wire entanglements. They seemed to bear charmed lives, for always there had been the whine of machine gun bullets, and the scream of shrapnel thrown from the heavier guns situated in the rear of the German lines.

Now, thoroughly exhausted, they had willingly obeyed the order that meant the end of that day's fighting, and had cast, first their packs, and then

themselves, down upon the camping ground that had been designated as theirs for the night.

By the time "chow" had been eaten, they began to feel a little better, but had nothing in mind except to turn in, when suddenly their attention was arrested by the whirring hum of an aeroplane engine coming rapidly to a position directly over them. The first thought of every soldier is, "Is it an enemy machine?" but one glance served to assure them that it was an American plane.

They naturally expected that the machine would continue on its course, but suddenly Frank exclaimed, "Look at that, fellows! It's circling around as though the pilot intended to land. What in the world would he want to come down here for?"

"Possibly he's been having engine trouble," speculated Tom. And he was not far wrong, for this was indeed the reason for the aviator's sudden descent. Spying the opening in the trees, he had decided to make a landing there, rather than proceed further and take the chance of being forced to descend in even a more unfavorable location.

The boys watched with interest as the machine descended lower and lower in graceful spirals, and finally took the ground as the aviator landed skillfully on a smooth patch of turf.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Frank, as the friends

started to run toward it, "there's something about that aviator that looks mighty familiar to me. I knew it!" a moment later, "it's good old Dick Lever, and he's sure a sight for sore eyes. How in the name of all that's good did he ever happen to get in this part of the world, I wonder."

This question was soon answered, for by now the boys had reached the machine, and amid joyful shouts Dick Lever was dragged from the pilot's seat and laughingly told to "give an account of himself."

"Well, that's not very hard to do," he said, "provided, of course, that you Indians don't pull me limb from limb before I get the chance to. It's fine to be so welcome, but I'm beginning to be afraid I'll never be able to live through it. Have a heart, can't you?"

"All right, then, come across with the information," laughed Frank. "We're so used to questioning Hun prisoners, that we've got the habit, and find it hard to be easy with you, I suppose."

"Well, there's not much to tell," said the aviator. "I was just recently detailed to this sector, and since arriving here I have been having a busy time of it, I can tell you. The Boches on this sector are right on the job, and don't seem to scare nearly so easily as they generally do. I had a brush with one several hours ago, and chased him well back of the German lines. He

landed safely, though, so I turned around to get back, when my engine started missing. It wasn't so very bad, but I thought it would be better to land and tinker it up before it got worse, so when I saw this opening through the tops of the trees, I decided to come down and see if I couldn't make temporary repairs. But if I had known you fellows were down here waiting for me, I think I'd have come down even faster than I did."

"Well," said Frank, "let's take a look at your engine, and see if we can't locate the trouble. But I won't really be sorry if we don't, because then you'll have to stay here all night."

"Yes, that's true enough," replied Dick. "But just at present I don't want to be put out of business over night if I can help it. Every aviator on this sector is on the lookout for a certain Boche plane that has been making a pest of itself around here, and the one that succeeds in bringing him down is going to be considered a real ace."

"Why, has he been doing such a lot of damage?" asked Billy.

"Damage!" exclaimed Dick, "I should say he has been doing damage. And not only that, but he does it in such a way that none of us so far has had any chance for a comeback."

"How's that?" inquired Tom.

"His favorite stunt is to come over our lines along about dusk, and drop his load of bombs

where he thinks they will do the most good. Then he makes a quick turn about and escapes, either going directly back to his lines, or, more often, rising high enough to reach a cloud stratum, and hiding in that. And by the time our fellows get out after him, it's so dark that there's no chance of seeing him. He's responsible for the death of any number of our fellows, and nobody knows how much damage to roads and ammunition trains."

"That's the Boche's regular game," commented Frank, bitterly, "their 'planes always run the minute they think a superior force is coming out against them. It would be wonderful if you could be the one to capture him, Dick."

"Wonderful! I should say it would," exclaimed the young aviator. "But that tricky way he has of cloud hiding, together with his habit of only attacking right on the edge of darkness, makes it a mighty hard proposition to come up with him. But I or one of the other fellows will get him eventually, never fear."

"If only there were some way to tag him so that he could be followed easier," said Frank, slowly.

"Yes, but that's a pretty big if," said Billy, "supposing you come down to earth and give us some practical suggestion about how it's going to be done."

"Well, maybe I will," replied Frank, to whom had come the glimmering of an idea, "you fellows know that illuminating paint they use for signs, and so forth, so that they can be read in the dark, don't you?"

"Right you are!" exclaimed Dick, who grasped the other's thought in the twinkling of an eye, "if we could douse this Boche's plane with some of that mixture, a blind man could follow his progress after dark. But then," he concluded, less enthusiastically, "the problem arises as to how we are going to get the paint on his machine. It reminds me of trying to catch a bird by putting salt on his tail."

"Well, it might be worth trying, anyway," said Frank, defending his project. "Why couldn't you take a pail of this with you, and then there's a bare possibility that you might be able to drop some of it on him. One splash of that stuff on his machine, and you'd have the easiest job in the world following him. The darker the night, the better."

"By Jove, it's worth trying, anyway," said Dick, caught up on a wave of enthusiasm. "I'll try anything once, anyway. But now the question is, where are we going to get the paint?"

"There's a supply wagon not over a mile from here," replied Frank, "if you're game for the hike, I'll go with you, and we'll see if we can't get some."

"You're on!" exclaimed the aviator. "You two fellows stay here to see that no one monkeys with my machine," addressing Billy Waldon and Tom Bradford.

"All right," agreed Tom. "But you'd better shake a foot or some of this bunch will be taking your machine apart for souvenirs," and he laughingly indicated the interested group of doughboys who had by this time sauntered up.

Frank and Dick set off at a smart pace, as they were all eagerness to try the novel experiment, and there was no time to lose, if it were to be done that night, as it was then after five o'clock, and nearing the time at which the German aviator usually made his raids. They maintained a brisk pace, and it was not long before they reached a group of supply wagons, carrying all sorts of supplies and equipment. They had some difficulty in explaining matters to the officer in charge, but at last he was moved by their enthusiasm, and gave them permission to draw a small pail full of the illuminating paint. This was a special mixture of chemicals, and was extensively used by our army for signs, indicating arrows, etc., where it was impossible or inconvenient to have a special light to show up the object at night.

The two friends made short work of the return trip, and surprised those waiting for them by the promptitude of their return.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Billy, "I can see the finish

of that Boche already, when two speed merchants like you go romping on his trail. He's got about as much chance as a cootie in a disinfecting tank."

"We haven't got much time to spare," said Dick; "it's getting dark already, and I've still got to clean the spark plugs in my machine."

"We'll all help you do that," volunteered Tom, and with wrenches that Dick gave them, they soon had the offending spark plugs apart, thoroughly cleaned, and restored to their proper sphere of usefulness. Then, while some of the onlooking soldiers held the plane, Dick gave the propeller a whirl, and the motor started with a reassuring roar.

"That sounds good," said Dick, as he climbed into the pilot's seat. "Now, hand me up that paint, and I'm off on the trail of the Hun."

Billy handed him the pail, and Dick, after carefully depositing it at his feet, waved his hand in farewell. The boys had just started a cheer for him, when they were interrupted by the sound of a heavy detonation. For a brief space the artillery of both sides had been silent, and they could tell from the sound of the explosion that it was not caused by a gun. Even as they all listened, it came again,—a dull, heavy shock that caused the very earth to shake, and this time it seemed nearer.

"That's our Boche friend!" exclaimed Dick Lever. "Let her go, boys! Maybe this time I'll have the luck to get the brute!" and as the soldiers loosed their holds, the aeroplane swept forward, and then, at a quick motion on Dick's part, soared gracefully into the air. Dick slanted swiftly upward into the gathering twilight, and soon became indistinguishable to the straining eyes of those on the ground. Only the sound of his whirring motor remained to tell them of the gallant man willingly risking his life for his country.

As the sound of his motor grew fainter, the throb of another engine insensibly mingled with it, but the later comer had the irregular pulsations that all the Americans recognized as coming from a German machine.

"I'll wager anything that's the Boche!" exclaimed Tom, and everybody there agreed with him. It was now almost fully dark, and although the boys strained their eyes they could make out nothing of the duel that was going on a mile or two above the earth.

But suddenly a weird and fascinating thing happened. From out the black vault of the night sky a rippling, streaming cascade of fire leaped downward for a space, and then suddenly mushroomed out in a sparkling splash of phosphorescent light. Smaller stars and streamers spread

out in all directions and gradually melted out as they fell earthward. But there remained a faint, ghostlike, unreal patch of swiftly moving light, that the breathless watchers knew must be the Boche aeroplane.

"It worked!" exclaimed Frank. "That Hun aviator is done for now, because Dick can see him, and he can't see Dick."

Even as he spoke, a stream of red fire spit viciously out from a point slightly above the German, who had now turned and was flying for dear life back to his own lines. For a space the weird attack continued, and the German, apparently giving up hope of safety in flight, turned and fired desperately toward the stream of deadly fire that marked the position of Dick's machine gun.

But suddenly, one of the deadly bullets from the machine gun got home, for the patch of light marking the Hun machine, wavered, swerved, and then dived swiftly earthward.

# CHAPTER X

## TANK AGAINST TANK

A GREAT sigh arose from the group of soldiers gazing spellbound on this drama of war. The German aeroplane fell swiftly until it was perhaps halfway to the earth, and then straightened out for a second, hesitated, and started turning over and over as it neared the uprushing earth. The top of its wings seemed fairly covered with the greenish luminous paint, that smoked and glowed and gave the ill-fated aeroplane the appearance of a gigantic pinwheel as it came hurtling earthward.

For what seemed a long time to the fascinated watchers, but was in reality only a brief space of time, the machine continued its downward course, and then disappeared as it fell below the fringe of tree-tops marking the edge of the clearing. It seemed to have landed quite near, but the Americans, experienced in these matters, knew that it was probably a matter of two or three miles from where they stood.

"Well!" exclaimed Frank at last, drawing a

long breath, "there's one less murdering Boche for Uncle Sam to deal with. May their tribe decrease!"

"Amen," said Tom. "I wonder if Dick has come off safely?"

The others also felt anxiety on this point, but it was soon dispelled, for they heard the sound of his motor as he descended rapidly. Of course, it was impossible for him to land now, on account of the darkness, but as he swooped low over the treetops he fired a few rounds of ammunition from his machine gun, by way of greeting, and the boys raised a lusty cheer, which, however, it is very doubtful if he heard, owing to the noise of his motor. Then he straightened out in a line for the aeroplane base in back of the American lines, and gradually the hum of his motor faded out in the distance.

"Maybe we'll come across the remains of that German machine when we advance to-morrow," speculated Billy. "But whether we do or not, that ought to be a tip for our airmen. That was one idea of yours, Frank, that wasn't quite as bad as the majority of your ideas."

"Well, if I can have an idea that works out like that one once in a while, I'm entitled to have a few poor ones," retorted Frank, and retired with the honors of war.

By this time "taps" was almost due, and the

boys set about rigging up their "pup" tents, and getting ready for the night. In spite of the weariness caused by the strenuous and exciting day, they managed to stay awake long enough to discuss the thrilling air battle they had witnessed, but then fell asleep until the notes of "reveille" recalled them to another day of this stern game called war.

The next morning they were up with the first notes of the bugle, and by the time dawn had fairly broken were through breakfast and ready for what the day might bring forth. Then the bugle blew the "assembly" and the soldiers fell into orderly ranks, standing at attention while muster was read.

Their commanding officer then gave them a short talk in which he praised their progress on the preceding day, and expressed his confidence that they would do as well or better to-day. Then the order was given to advance, and the formation moved forward at a walk, keeping as good a line as possible over the broken terrain, but inevitably breaking up into small parties as the difficulties of the advance became more and more pronounced.

The Germans had apparently retreated to a considerable distance, for at first the Americans met with no opposition except that offered by the tangles of barbed wire and abandoned trenches

with which they were continually coming into contact. Frank, Billy and Tom kept a lookout in every direction for the destroyed German aeroplane, but their vigilance was doomed to go unrewarded, for they saw not a sign of it.

By noon time the Americans had begun to come in contact with the enemy again, and were again engaged in the grim business of clearing out stubbornly held trenches and machine gun nests. The Germans fought for every foot of ground, but were slowly but surely forced backward, ever giving way to men who were better soldiers than they were. Always they had the advantage of carefully planned and constructed fortifications, and yet always they were beaten out of them. By noon the Americans had registered a satisfactory advance, and the order was given to rest while the wearied soldiers were given food and a chance to get a very much needed rest.

Soon after our three friends had eased the packs off their aching shoulders and thrown themselves on the ground, they saw a small party of five men, three of whom were officers, approach their commanding officer, and after the usual salutes, enter into conversation with him. Shortly afterward, the two non-commissioned men were dismissed, and strolled over toward the three friends. Seeing them coming, these latter hospi-

tably offered tobacco, matches, and chewing gum, and shortly learned that the newcomers were members of the Tank Corps. One of them had seen a good deal of service in this comparatively new branch of the Army, and with a little skillful urging was led to talk of some of his experiences.

"Yes," he said, in answer to a question from Tom, "some pretty queer things happen out there in no man's land, and the tanks get their share, I can tell you. I've had experiences myself."

"I don't doubt it," said Frank. "But these tanks seem to have put a great fear into the Boches, at that."

"You bet they have!" exclaimed the other, "and it's too bad that we can't use them very much here. But of course, with all these trees and the thick underbrush, they're practically out of the question. But that's what we're here for now—looking over the ground, to see if in some places they can't be used to some extent."

"I've often wondered," said Billy, "why the Huns haven't used tanks more. They don't seem to have anything like the success with them that our men have had."

"Well, for one thing, they're not as well made, and when it comes to tank against tank, we almost always out-manœuvre them," said Arney, for such was the tank man's name.

"I've often wondered what would happen if two tanks had a pitched battle," said Frank, "I suppose that happens sometimes, doesn't it?"

"Often enough," said Arney. "I was in one once that stacked up against a Boche tank, so I am in a position to know, if anyone is."

"How was that?" queried Tom.

"Well, the way it happened was this," replied the other, "our side had planned an attack one morning at dawn, but as it happened, the German had also planned one against us at the same time. Of course, neither side knew what the other was up to, so it came as a pretty big surprise when the Boches opened their bombardment just a few minutes before ours was due to commence.

"This didn't stop us, though, and our batteries opened up full split in reply. My tank was due to start out at six o'clock, and promptly on schedule we got away. It was still pitch dark, though, and raining as usual, and as neither side was sending up star shells for fear of exposing their own operations, we had very little to guide us. We lost our way a couple of times, at the same time falling behind our schedule, and when we finally did get on the right track, we trundled along at top speed. Top speed doesn't mean very much to a tank, to look at it from the outside, but when you're on the inside, with the engine going full split, and rocking along over

ground that's been ploughed up about a million times by big shells, you certainly do know you're moving.

"Well, we had travelled maybe half a mile, when suddenly we stopped dead, with a slam that nearly took my teeth out. At first I thought we must have hit a big tree, but then I remembered that all the trees around that section had been blasted into kindling wood a good many months ago, and as about everything else had shared the same fate, I didn't know what had happened to us. But in a few seconds we had our searchlight going, and then I found out what was the matter pretty quick. There in front of us, butted square into us, was a big Boche tank."

Here the narrator paused to roll a cigarette, while the boys waited impatiently for him to go on. After deliberately making and lighting his cigarette, he took a few deep puffs, and resumed his narrative.

"Well, boys, I figured we were up against it for fair in more ways than one. The driver put her into low gear, and threw in the clutch again and again, but it was no use. I suppose the other fellow was doing the same thing, and neither of us could budge an inch. Then, first thing we knew, a big explosive bullet came crashing through our armor, and stretched the driver over his seat, done for for good. I depressed my gun

as far as it would go, and tried to get back at the Boche, but he could get his gun lower than I could get mine, and my bullets just bounced off his armor, because they hit it at such a big angle.

"I went down and told our lieutenant how things stood, and he took the place of the dead driver, and threw her into reverse, but the Boche realized his advantage, and followed us up so close that I never got a chance to get a direct hit on him. It looked pretty bad for us, and I thought it was about time to say 'Good-bye, sweet world, good-bye.' But the Lieutenant kept his wits about him, and suddenly had an idea.

"As we backed down into a big shell crater, he waited until the nose of the Boche tank came rolling over the edge, and then suddenly shot our machine forward, so that it slid in under the German. That gave me my chance, and maybe you think I didn't take advantage of it. I began pumping steel jacketed bullets in through the floor of that tank so fast they must have thought it was a machine gun doing it. They saw what they were up against, and tried to retire. But we followed them close, and never gave them a chance to get away.

"Seeing that they couldn't escape that way, they suddenly reversed and tried to climb over us, but the Lieutenant was some driver, I can tell you, and reversed about as quickly as they did, so

that was no go. Oh, we had them right that time, and no doubt about it."

Here Arney took a last lingering puff at the remnants of his cigarette, and regretfully tossed it away.

"Well, how did it end?" questioned Billy, eagerly.

"Oh, we got their gasoline tank, and then it was all over," replied Arney, "of course, all the time the Lieutenant was backing and filling, I was pumping bullets into them for all I was worth. Suddenly there came a terrific explosion, and the whole inside of that tank was on fire with burning gasoline. That finished those who were left in it, and then we backed away from under, and as our men had reached their objectives by that time, we returned to our own lines. We were pretty well torn up by the encounter, but still had a little fight left in us."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Billy, when Arney had concluded his narrative, "I think that's the service I'd like to get into. You get some excitement there."

"You are certainly hard to please!" exclaimed Tom. "Chances are you'll get all the excitement you want this afternoon, when we get in touch with the Germans again. Making a frontal attach on a machine gun emplacement is all the excitement my young heart craves."

"You're probably easily satisfied," grinned

Billy. "But if your young heart craves that method of diversion, we'll let you go after the next one all by your lonesome."

Arney grinned at this exchange of repartee, and then, shaking hands all around, took his departure. Shortly afterward the bugle sounded, and once more the tedious and costly attack was resumed.

# CHAPTER XI

## LIQUID FIRE

It was soon apparent that contact with the Germans had been made in earnest, for the resistance, which had been comparatively light in the morning, stiffened perceptibly. Machine gun nests became more and more frequent, and in every case the machine gunners stood by their pieces until the last man was killed, or the gun put out of action.

The Americans advanced as they could, some parts of the line of course preceding others, according to the resistance offered by the Germans. The portion in which the three friends were placed met with particularly stubborn resistance. They had to advance into a crossfire from several closely connected machine gun emplacements, but that was what they were there for, and they advanced to the task with a dogged persistence that shook the nerves of the Germans.

"This is getting to be pretty hot work," panted Frank. "We've got to clean up some of those fellows pretty quick, or they're going to clean us up."

"All right, then, up and at 'em!" exclaimed Tom, and with a shout the three friends dashed forward, crouching low to avoid the storm of machine gun bullets that whizzed by over their heads. On they dashed, until they reached the parapet surrounding one machine gun. Without a pause, they leaped over this, and, using their revolvers with deadly effect, quickly despatched the Germans who formed its crew.

"So far, so good," gritted Frank, the lust of battle in his eyes. "There's another parapet over there, fellows, and it's a cinch there's one of these hornets concealed behind it. Let's get after it before the crew discovers us. They're not firing now, but they're apt to begin any minute."

"We're with you!" shouted Tom and Billy, and the three fearless Americans raced for this new obstacle. It seemed strange that the Germans did not open fire on them, but they thought at first this was because the Germans had not yet seen them. They themselves were on a slightly elevated portion of ground, and over the Germans' parapet could see the men standing about, but making no move to stop them.

The boys did not stop to figure out the reason for this, however, but raced toward the position, and with shouts of triumph climbed over the pile of stones and sand bags. They were on

the point of falling savagely on the Germans, when suddenly Tom exclaimed:

"There's no use wasting ammunition on these fellows. They're about as dead as they can be, already."

And it was indeed as Tom said. Caught, probably, by the gas from a bursting poison shell, they had died as they stood, and, leaning against the barricade, most of them had remained in a standing position, although two or three lay stretched out on the ground.

"We had our worry for nothing, here," observed Frank, "although we took the position, and that's about all anyone can do, after all."

The boys had outstripped all their companions, so they took a brief breathing spell while they were waiting for the others to come up. Soon they could see their comrades approaching, and at the same time a machine gun about a hundred feet to their right, of whose presence they had not been aware up to this time, started in a savage fusillade against the approaching boys in khaki.

"We'll put a stop to that!" exclaimed Frank, and, as the others caught his meaning, all leaped to the German machine gun, and in a few seconds had it trained on the enemy. The Hun position was only lightly defended on the sides, and the machine gun projectiles bored through these, and wrought instant execution

among the startled Germans. The fire from their machine gun died out, and the boys knew that here was one more menace disposed of. The Americans, with this handicap removed, rushed forward with cheers, and soon the three friends were surrounded by their comrades in arms.

The line pushed forward again, the places of those falling being taken by others eager to get their chance at the hated Boche. Machine gun after machine gun was taken, and trench after trench cleared out, but the defenses were so elaborate and so numerous that progress was at times heartbreakingly slow. Shells from the American batteries in the rear fell constantly before them, helping somewhat to clear the ground, but still leaving much to be done by the infantry. About the middle of the afternoon a halt was called, the Americans crouching in captured trenches for a brief period of recuperation.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Billy, "I may be all wrong, fellows, but just the same I have a feeling that the Boches don't want us to capture the Argonne Forest. Don't know what gives me that feeling, but I've got it all the same."

"You certainly have wonderful powers of observation," said Frank, dryly. "But come to think of it, I shouldn't wonder if you were right. But before we get through with them they'll wish they had made us a present of it in the first place, and saved themselves a bad licking."

"Maybe—" started Tom, but he was cut short by the command to resume the advance.

The Americans leaped from the trench and with a lusty cheer pressed onward. But the Germans had a most unpleasant surprise in store for them. As they approached one trench, instead of bullets, streams of searing fire came shooting toward them.

The Americans knew that this was the dreaded "liquid fire" that they had heard about, but up to now had never actually experienced. However, they knew that the trench had been captured, and so, shielding their faces as well as they could with their arms, they dashed forward, throwing hand grenades as they ran. The liquid fire only reached a distance of about a hundred feet, which made their task a little easier, cutting down the distance they had to go in the face of this obstacle to reach the trench.

This liquid fire was one of the most infernal of the German inventions. The soldier operating it had on his back a bag containing the necessary chemicals, connected to a short length of hose with a narrow nozzle. When the chemicals contained in the bag combined, they formed a high pressure and as the chemical stream left the nozzle it burst into flame. The pressure was sufficient to carry it a considerable distance, and the acid seared and ate into any object with which it came into contact. It was one of the most

dreaded of modern instruments of war, and it took the highest form of courage to face it.

But it was just that kind of courage that distinguished the American Army, and with shouts and cries of encouragement the American soldiers leaped forward. Their hand grenades took instant effect, for almost at once the number of streams turned on them lessened, but there were still plenty left to make it exciting and hazardous work.

Crouching almost double, the Americans dashed forward through this shower of death, and at last leaped into the German trenches. Then their heavy revolvers came into play, and the tables were quickly turned. In a very few minutes the remaining Boches threw up their hands and cried for quarter. A number were taken prisoners, but the majority had made their last accounting.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Frank, when he had recovered his breath. "That's the first time I ever bumped up against that stuff, and I sure hope it's the last. I'm willing to take my chance against bullets, but that chemical fire is a little too much to suit me."

"It came near getting me," said Billy. "Just take a look at my coat, will you?"

They looked, and uttered exclamations of astonishment. The entire front of Billy's coat was

eaten away, with blackened edges for all the world as if it had been burned by ordinary fire.

"You're pretty lucky to have gotten off as easy as that," said Frank, soberly. "Uncle Sam will give you a new coat. Some of the poor fellows have been horribly burned," and he indicated a number of stretcher bearers who were slowly carrying their burdens to the rear.

"Yes, I guess I can't kick," agreed Billy. "Just make out we won't have something to tell Bart when we see him again. He'll certainly be sore at having to miss all this."

"He sure will," agreed Frank, "he'll never get over not being with us on this drive."

"Let's investigate one of these flame throwing machines," proposed Frank. "It looks as though we might be here a little while, and I'm curious to see what the things look like."

His companions readily acceded to his proposal, and stripped one of the machines from a dead German, and were soon familiar with its main features. They did not have time to make a very thorough examination, however, for the word to resume the advance was shortly passed down the line, and they resumed the drive.

From that time on the going was a little easier, and they made satisfactory progress, inflicting great losses on the Germans, and losing only a comparatively small number of men themselves.

Toward nightfall, the rain, which had held off all day, began to fall heavily, and this soon put an end to the advance for that day, as they were already far beyond the point they had expected to reach.

It was a thoroughly weary but nevertheless cheerful and triumphant lot of young Americans who made camp that night, for they had the consciousness of obstacles overcome and difficult work well done that made their bodily weariness seem a thing of small account.

# CHAPTER XII

## BEATING THE HUNS TO THEIR KNEES

"HURRAH!" cried Frank, as he came running up to his comrades in a state of great excitement.

"What's up?" asked Billy.

"The jig's up," returned Frank.

"Whose jig?" asked Tom.

"The Huns', you boob," Frank replied exultantly. "They've come to the end of their string. They're down and out—kerflummexed—*ausgespielt*—and if there's anything worse than that they're that."

"Now," said Billy, "come down to earth and tell us what you mean. Talk to us in plain English, so that our simple minds can take it in."

"Simple is right," grinned Frank. "Well, then, here goes. The Huns have applied for an armistice. They've thrown up the sponge. They want to quit and they say so."

"Bully!" cried Tom. "So they've got enough of it at last. We've hammered them into pulp."

"I knew we'd bring them to their knees," ex-

claimed Billy jubilantly. "Their goose was cooked when the Yanks got into the fight. But how do you know? Where did you get the news?"

"I heard the major talking with the captain about it," replied Frank. "I was sitting on a log cleaning my gun, and they came along and stopped to chin close to where I was. I got an earful of all that's been going on for the last two or three weeks. It seems that the high muckamucks in Berlin have been reading the handwriting on the wall, and it's been giving them the shivers. First Bulgaria caved in, then Turkey followed suit. Both of them have surrendered and are out of the war. Austria took a last chance and the Italians have smashed her to bits and captured five hundred thousand men."

The boys gasped.

"You're kidding us," protested Billy.

"Not a bit of it," denied Frank. "I'm giving it to you straight. They've just gone down one after the other like a row of dominoes. And now Germany has made up her mind that she'll have to eat crow, too. The Huns sent a letter to President Wilson asking him to take steps toward giving them an armistice."

"Armistice," echoed Tom a little doubtfully. "I don't exactly like the sound of that. It means that we shall stop fighting for a while. Why

should we? That would only give Heinie a chance to get his breath and start in fresh again. We've got him on the run now, and we ought to keep it up until we send him hotfoot over the Rhine."

"Wait now," said Frank. "I'm not through yet. Likely enough Heinie had that in mind. He's got everything to gain by getting a rest, and we've got everything to lose. But if that was one of his cute little tricks, he didn't get away with it. The President wrote back asking some awkward questions that put Heinie in a hole. There were two or three other notes, but the upshot of it all was that the Huns were told to apply to Marshal Foch and he would tell them where they got off. Of course it wasn't put in that way, but that's the sense of it. They've got to send to the Marshal and beg him to stop licking them. In other words, they'll have to admit defeat and sue for peace on the best terms they can get."

"But will they do it?" asked Billy. "They've still got a big army and a big fleet. You'd think they'd stick it out a bit longer in the hope that things might take a different turn."

"Yes," replied Frank. "The English would. The French would. The Americans would. But the baby-killers wouldn't. They're like all bullies. The stuff isn't there. When the pinch comes they

curl up. They're ready to quit right now, and in a few days you'll hear they've done it."

"It listens good," said Tom, "and of course in one way it's fine. But after what I've seen of the t ings they've done to France, it seems as though they were getting off too easy. They ought to have their own towns and cities devastated, their orchards cut down, their mills blown up and their coal mines flooded. Then they'd get a taste of what they've been doing to others."

"That's right," agreed Billy. "But don't think they're not going to pay for everything they've done. They'll be stripped to the bone and don't you forget it."

"Well, I hope so," said Tom, but with not much assurance. "I'd rather take it from them now and make sure of it. Nobody knows what will happen when those fellows get together and begin to bargain. They may throw away all the results of the war for all we can tell. It's happened more than once that the party that's been licked on the field has got off almost scot free, if not actually gaining, when the peace treaty came to be signed."

"Well, you old croaker," laughed Frank, "we'll have to leave all that to the diplomats and take our chances on their not letting the Huns put anything over on them. In the meantime, all we've got to do is to fight."

"Ours not to make reply,
Ours not to reason why,
Ours but to do and die,"

chanted Billy.

But with all his doubts, Tom went on with the fighting with renewed inspiration at the news that victory was near at hand. And his friends were filled with rejoicing that the Huns were being beaten to their knees and were about ready to acknowledge it. Their tremendous exertions and sacrifices in leaving America and coming across the sea to fight for liberty and civilization against brutality and barbarism had not been in vain. They felt something the way the Crusaders must have felt when they caught sight of Jerusalem, the goal of their endeavors.

And now the work of the last two weeks began to tell. The enemy resistance began to grow feebler, though he still hung on desperately and tried by stubborn rear-guard actions to hold these persistent Americans back. But the worst part of the forest had been cleared. The whole place had been a vast fortress. Above the ground every possible natural and artificial obstruction had been put in their path, and had had to be conquered one by one. Beneath the ground it had been like the Catacombs of Rome. There were subterranean passages, bombproof shelters, rail-

ways, communicating trenches, cunning traps, a thousand devices that the Germans had been four years in perfecting. But none of these had thwarted American ingenuity and American courage. And as the enemy saw how fruitless their endeavors were, their confidence melted away and began to give place to panic. Nothing could stop these Americans. What was the use of trying?

So the work grew easier for the Army Boys. They advanced faster and faster. They had got through the worst part of their task and were reaching the higher and clearer ground where tanks could operate more readily. Armored trucks and lorries were loaded with men and were sent forward in the direction of Stenay and Sedan. More prisoners were being brought in every day.

The big naval guns that had been brought over in sections by Plunkett's men were beginning now to demonstrate their value. They outranged anything the Germans had. They threw projectiles that weighed fourteen hundred pounds a distance of from fifteen to twenty miles and they were concentrated now on the railway line from Mezieres to Sedan that was the Germans' last hope either for supplies or retreat. The end was coming and coming fast, and the Army Boys were jubilant.

They were pressing forward in this mood one afternoon when they found themselves held up by an especially stubborn machine gun nest. It commanded a position that was the key of the German defense in that section and the Germans were putting forth herculean efforts to hold it.

It was useless to try to take it from in front, for a storm of bullets swept the road along which nothing could advance and live.

Corporal Wilson was given a squad of men, among whom were Frank, Billy and Tom, and commanded to silence the position.

They made a wide detour, worming their way along on both sides of the nest, and then at a given signal rushed the position. The startled gun crew turned their gun first one way and then the other in an attempt to check their assailants, but although some fell dead or wounded, the survivors reached their goal, leaped upon the gunners and bayoneted them at their posts.

"Gee, but that was a hot scrap!" panted Frank, as the last of the enemy went down.

"You bet it was," agreed Billy, "and we've had to pay for it too. We've lost several of our fellows. Poor Milt Barlow was toppled over and Fred Anderson got a bullet in his shoulder."

"This was a regular fort," commented Tom, as he looked about him. "Look at that pile of cartridges. There's thousands of rounds there. As

far as bullets were concerned, those fellows could have held out all day."

"The Heinies certainly wanted to hold it," said Billy, "and I shouldn't wonder if they tried to retake it."

"Here comes a bunch of them now," said Frank, as he looked in the direction of the German lines. "And they're opening up with artillery too," he added, as a shell came screaming through the air and exploded with a thunderous roar not fifty feet away.

A crackling rifle fire followed the shell, and a bullet ploughed through the scalp of the corporal, knocking him senseless.

There was no other officer at hand and Frank took command at once. His quick eye glancing about caught sight of a disabled and abandoned tank that was near by. It lay in such a position that its open door was on the side that faced the enemy.

"Quick!" he ordered. "Put the machine gun in that tank. Hurry now and bring all that ammunition along. But first put the corporal behind that tree where a bullet can't get him. Hustle's the word."

There was need for haste, for a body of the enemy that outnumbered them ten to one was approaching on the double quick. In a trice the wounded corporal was laid behind a tree in a

position of comparative safety, the gun was transported to the tank, together with the ammunition, and the little party was ready for the attack. Frank, Billy and Tom were crowded inside the tank with the gun, while four others lay down behind it in reserve, ready to take the place of any of the crew who might be killed or wounded.

Crouching as closely in the tank as he could, Frank slewed the gun around in the direction of the enemy and sent a hail of bullets against the advancing ranks.

Men were seen to stagger and fall, but their places were taken by others and the Germans continued to come on. But that stream of fire kept up remorselessly, and at last the wave of attackers faltered, broke and fled.

"They're running!" cried Billy exultantly.

"A lot of them will never run again," said Tom grimly, as he continued feeding the gun that Frank was aiming.

"They'll be back," prophesied Frank, for he could see the enemy in the shelter of the woods trying to reform. "This place is too important to give it up without another try. How's the ammunition holding out?"

"Plenty yet," replied Billy. "There must be a thousand rounds. And the best of it is that they're German bullets out of a German gun that we're feeding to Fritz."

"Shows how honest we are," chuckled Tom. "We're giving him all that belongs to him. And we're giving it to him too with compound interest."

Once more the Germans came on, only to be mowed down like corn before the reaper. The boys had thrown off all their upper garments now and were stripped to the waist, for the confined quarters of the tank and the heat of the firing were causing the perspiration to run down their faces and bodies in streams.

Suddenly Tom gave a cry of alarm.

"The gun's getting too hot!" he exclaimed. "It blisters you when you touch it. We'll have to give it a rest and let it cool off."

"Rest nothing," declared Frank, as he saw that the Germans were trying to advance. "They'd be on us before we'd be ready to fire again. Quick, you fellows, get your canteens and pour the water into the cooler of the gun. That'll keep it going so that we can use it."

"In a twinkling his comrades obeyed, and every drop that their canteens contained was emptied into the cooler. The result was apparent at once, and the gun continued its deadly work without interruption.

But now the Germans had brought up a field-piece and placed it in position where it had a good target in the tank, and shells began to fall thick

and fast in the vicinity of their temporary fort. It was evidently only a matter of time before one of them would strike it and put it out of business.

"Getting pretty hot," muttered Frank, as one shell fell within twenty feet and a great volume of smoke and dirt rolled over them.

"Can't you pick off the gunners, Frank?" asked Billy.

"I'm trying to," answered Frank, "but the bullets fall short. Those fellows are too far out of range."

As he spoke, there was a roar that almost split their eardrums and a sheel exploded within a few feet of the tank. It dug a great crater under one edge of the tank which began to topple ominously.

"Jump!" shouted Frank, and they leaped out just as the tank lurched over and tumbled into the hole.

They were just in time, for in another instant the monster would have carried them with it and probably caught them beneath its weight. As it was, Tom's leg was badly scraped by one of the edges as it passed him.

# CHAPTER XIII

## THE WHITE FLAG OF SURRENDER

THE Germans sent up a triumphant shout as they saw the tank go over, and a large detachment came rushing out of the woods. But by the time they had advanced a few yards, Frank and his squad grabbed their rifles, and, crouching behind what shelter they could find, sent a volley of bullets into the enemy ranks.

It was a critical position for the little group of Americans. The enemy at that special point outnumbered them, and military prudence would have dictated a retreat. But their fighting blood was up and their rifles still held several bullets each. They would at least empty these into the enemy ranks before they fell back. Then, too, there was the corporal, who had as yet given no sign of consciousness. The boys could not think of leaving him to be captured by the foe.

Moreover, the position was an important one, as was shown by the frantic eagerness of the Germans to regain it. All things considered, Frank determined to hold the ground to the death.

"They'll have to pay dearly for this place if they get it," he muttered between his clenched teeth as he disposed his little band to the best advantage. "Don't waste your bullets, boys. Take aim and make every one of them tell."

"Righto," responded Tom, as cool as a cucumber, as he took careful aim and saw a German throw up his hands and fall. "There's one less to bother about."

The others followed his example, and their bullets did stern execution, so much so that the Germans had an impression that they were faced by a much larger detachment than was really there. They hesitated and sought shelter behind trees while their officers conferred.

"Heinie thinks he's bitten off more than he can chew," chuckled Billy, as the little squad took advantage of the respite to reload their rifles.

"I guess the whole German army has had that impression for some time," laughed Tom.

"Don't kid yourselves," warned Frank. "This is only a breathing spell. This position may come high, but they have to have it, and you'll see them coming on again in a minute."

The words had scarcely fallen from his lips before the Germans appeared, with all their losses made up by the addition of new units, and came rushing toward them with an officer at their head, waving his revolver.

"Something new for Heinie," muttered Frank, as his eye ran along the stock of his rifle. "The officers usually send their men forward while they themselves stay in the rear."

His rifle spoke and the officer plunged forward to the ground.

"Good shooting," commended Billy, as a bullet from his gun also found its mark.

But this time the Germans were bound on winning through, and they came on with determination. The distance between the two forces lessened to a hundred feet, then to eighty, then to fifty. The Army Boys pumped lead into the enemy ranks as fast as their fingers could pull the trigger and the German loss was heavy, but still they kept on.

"Fix bayonets," commanded Frank, his eyes blazing, as the line got within thirty feet of him. "When I give the word, follow me."

Another moment passed.

"Forward!" shouted Frank, and the next instant he sprang forward with leveled bayonet, with his devoted little band close on his heels.

There was a shout and a volley from the Germans and two of Frank's men fell wounded, but the rest kept on and in another second they were in the midst of the German ranks and giving them the bayonet.

Stabbing and hacking, they hewed their way into the mass. And just at that moment there

was a great cheer behind them and a company of the old Thirty-seventh with Captain Baker at their head came pounding along and threw themselves into the fight.

The tables had turned and turned with a vengeance, and now it was the Germans who were outnumbered. They were already disconcerted by the savageness of Frank's attack and the coming of the new foe threw them into a panic. They put up a show of resistance, but this soon vanished, and they broke and fled, pursued by the Americans who did not pause in the work until they had rounded up the greater portion of the fleeing enemy as prisoners.

The captain congratulated Frank and his comrades warmly for their gallant stand, but there was little time for talk, for much remained to be done. The prisoners were sent to the rear and the wounded were gathered up and taken away to an advanced dressing station. The corporal, they were glad to be told, was not fatally wounded, although he would probably be in the hospital for a couple of weeks.

"That means that he's probably fired his last shot at a Hun," remarked Frank. "By the time he comes out it will be all over but the shouting."

"Come out of your dream," said Tom, who could never see what he thought was a bubble without a desire to stick a pin in it. "We're a long way yet from the Rhine."

"But we're getting nearer all the time," chimed in Billy. "I'll bet we'll be sailing on it before Christmas."

"And listening to the Lorelei singing," grinned Frank.

"Yes," laughed Billy, "but it'll be a different song from the one she's used to. Instead of *Die Wacht am Rhein* she'll be singing the Marseillaise and the Star Spangled Banner. I'll bet she's practicing up on it now so as to be ready for us."

"I don't know what brand of dope you fellows are using," protested Tom, "but whatever it is I'd advise you to change it."

But his comrades were better prophets than Tom was willing to admit, for that very night Frank had an interview with Colonel Pavet that changed his hopes into a certainty.

The colonel was coming out of headquarters when he recognized Frank, who was on sentry duty near by. The colonel came to Frank at once with his usual cordial greeting.

"I suppose you have heard the news," he said.

"No," said Frank. "What is it Colonel?"

"The German delegates are coming to meet Marshal Foch," smiled the French officer, whose exultation appeared in his tones.

"Good!" said Frank delightedly. "They ought to be coming on their knees."

"Well, it amounts to that," laughed the French colonel. "It means nothing less than surrender. They have been the first to cry quits. They asked your President to intercede with the Allies for them, and he told them that they would have to apply to Marshal Foch for terms. Ah, *mon ami*, that was a bitter pill for the Germans to swallow. But they swallowed it. The Marshal replied to them that they would have to come to his headquarters and he would tell them the terms on which he would grant their plea. So the Germans have appointed a commission to visit the Marshal and they are on their way now. They will reach our lines in an hour or two and then they will be taken in charge by French officers, blindfolded and conveyed to the Marshal's presence."

"And where is that?" asked Frank.

"Ah, that is a military secret," smiled the colonel, shaking his finger in mock reproof. "The Germans would have been very glad if they had been able to find that out during the war. But they'll find it out soon enough now," he added with a laugh.

"I'd give a good deal to see the interview," said Frank.

"It would indeed be something to remember," agreed the colonel. "I would give some years of my life if I could have that privilege myself. But

I ought not to complain, for I at least will be able to see the opening scene of the great world play."

"How is that?" asked Frank with great interest.

"My regiment will be in charge of that part of the French line where the German delegates will first appear on their visit to the Marshal," replied the colonel. "Their route has been planned out for them. The pleasant duty will devolve on me of having them blindfolded and then sending them on their journey under French escort. I am on my way back to my regiment now in order to have everything in readiness."

"For a moment I could almost wish that I were in your regiment," laughed Frank.

"And I would only be too delighted if you were," returned the colonel. "The regiment holds no braver man. But wait a moment," he said, as a thought struck him. "I will see what arrangements I may be able to make."

He went inside headquarters again and after a few moments returned.

"I shall need a messenger," he said, "to bring back certain details to your commander. I had at first intended to entrust that work to my orderly, but what you said gave me a new idea. I have asked your commander to let me take you with me for that purpose and he has readily agreed. You will be relieved from guard duty

and you can take my orderly's horse and come along with me. My regiment is not a great way from yours, as our lines nearly touch, and you can be back in your quarters by midnight."

"Thank you a thousand times!" said Frank joyfully. "You have put me under a great obligation."

"A mere trifle," replied the colonel, waving the thanks aside. "I can never forget that I owe my life to you. You can join me here in a few minutes and we will go on."

The sergeant of the guard came up shortly and relieved Frank, who hurried to his dugout to make some hasty preparations and tell his friends of his good fortune. They were overjoyed.

"Lucky dog," remarked Billy, giving him a resounding thump on the shoulder. "I only wish that the colonel needed three messengers instead of one so that we could all go along."

"If you fell overboard, you wouldn't get wet," chaffed Tom. "Give my best regards to the Heinies when you see them and tell them how sorry I am that they've got to eat crow."

"I won't forget," laughed Frank, as he shook hands hurriedly and hastened off.

He found the colonel waiting for him. In a moment Frank had mounted the orderly's horse and he and the colonel rode off together.

"By the way," remarked the colonel, in the

course of the conversation that ensued as they rode side by side, "I heard from Andre two days ago, and he said that things were not progressing as favorably as he could hope in regard to the De Latour property. Quite unexpectedly additional obstacles have come up. I was not going to bother you about this, for I knew you would be greatly worried. But the war has changed many things, and things in law are not so easy to adjust as they were. I am still hoping that all will come out right in the end. He, however, expects that he will be able to have the title perfected before Christmas, which is now less than two months off. I know the delay is exasperating, but that is to be expected in all legal affairs. I thank the stars," he added with a smile, "that I was made a soldier instead of a lawyer."

"I agree with you," returned Frank, "and yet we couldn't very well do without them, and I am very thankful to your brother as well as yourself for the kindness you have shown in trying to secure my mother's rights."

Frank tried to speak lightly but he was forced to heave a heavy sigh. There had been so many delays in the past! Would his mother ever be able to prove her claim to that property and really take possession of it?

In a little while they had reached the French lines.

"You see," smiled the colonel, "that I was right when I said it would be a race between us to see who would get first to Sedan. We've kept pretty well up with you, although your task has been far the harder. Oh, you Americans! I'm glad that you're our friends instead of our enemies as I should hate to have to face your soldiers in the field."

"We'll never meet except as brothers in arms," returned Frank. "That's what Washington and Lafayette were, and our nations have been the closest of friends ever since. The greatest republic of the old world and the greatest of the new have always stood and will always stand for liberty and civilization."

They soon reached the colonel's quarters, and the latter then confided Frank to the charge of a young lieutenant, with instructions that he should be given refreshments and be treated with every courtesy and attention. The young fellow was of about the same age as Frank, and was delighted to find that the latter spoke French almost as perfectly as himself. They were soon chatting together like old friends.

Throughout the regiment there was an attitude of solemnity and expectation. The men had been told of what was coming and it had thrilled them with a feeling too deep for words. They stood at rest in the darkness, and few words were inter-

changed. Each was realizing that the end of the four years of agony was in sight. France and her Allies had won their fight. The brutal, beastly power that had sought to drench the world in tears and blood and sow it with graves had been brought to its knees. Right had conquered. Men could stand erect instead of crouching as slaves. The would-be oppresser, cowed and cringing, had come to beg for mercy.

Suddenly at a turn of the road a stream of light flashed out, and there was a stir in the ranks. The light came nearer, and it could be seen that it came from a large automobile that was rapidly approaching. Other cars followed and the landscape was flooded with light.

But the thing that thrilled Frank to the marrow was this:

*Over every car floated a white flag.*

# CHAPTER XIV

## VICTORY

THE Hun was beaten at last.

Those white flags meant surrender, defeat.

The bully of Europe was whipped.

Germany's wild and wicked adventure was ended. She had appealed to force and force had answered her.

The pirate flag, the flag of the skull and cross-bones, had been hauled down. In its place was the white flag that admitted defeat and sued for terms.

The cars drove up to where Colonel Pavet and his officers were standing. There they came to a stop.

One by one, the German peace delegates descended from the car. They were received with cold and ceremonious politeness.

One of the men, the leader of the party, was in civilian dress. The others were in military or naval uniforms.

The formalities were soon over. They had reached the French lines and from now on would

be in the custody of French officers. One by one the delegates were blindfolded, so that they might gain no information of military importance as they passed through the French lines. Then the delegates were helped into their seats, the French officers who were to accompany them gave the signal, and the cars started off on their long journey to the forest of Compiegne, where in a railroad car, drawn up on a siding, there was waiting for them the grave, stern soldier, whose genius had struck a deathblow to the German cause just when its prospects seemed brightest, and who had kept hammering at the crumbling lines until the end had come in the blackness of utter and absolute defeat.

Frank drew a long breath as the last of the line of cars faded from sight in the darkness. So many sensations had come crowding in upon him in the last few minutes that his brain was in a whirl. He knew that he had been privileged to see one of the most momentous happenings in the history of the world.

So engrossed was he in his thoughts that it was almost as in a dream that he exchanged cordial greetings with Colonel Pavet and the young lieutenant and started on his ride homeward. He had anticipated a hilarious time in narrating to Tom and Billy all he had felt and seen, but he was really glad when he arrived at

his quarters that they were sound asleep. Ordinarily he would have wakened them without ceremony, but just now he wanted to snuggle down in his blanket and go over and over again in his mind the events of that night of nights.

His first and controlling thought was that of his country. Above everything else he was an American through and through. He was proud of his country, of its traditions, of its history, of its glorious flag. For that flag he had risked his life again and again. He loved it with a consuming passion. Old Glory! The tears came to his eyes as he thought of it. The flag that had always stood for human freedom and human rights, the flag that had never covered an ignoble cause, the flag that had never been sullied by stain, had never been smirched by defeat, had never been dragged in the dust. Now once more it was triumphant in the greatest war that had ever been waged on earth. God bless it!

Later his thoughts took a more personal turn. It meant that soon he would be back with that dear mother of his whose love for him had kept him clean and straight through all this terrible conflict. He saw the little house in Camport, embowered in roses, saw himself going back there, saw his mother running to the gate to meet him.

It was a long time before he fell asleep.

In the morning he was his own jolly care-free self again and it was well that he was, for he was besieged with questions by his chums concerning all the details of his experience.

"Well, you haughty diplomat," was Billy's greeting, "have you settled the terms of the armistice? Have you ordered the Kaiser to be shot? Out with it, now."

"Hardly that," laughed Frank. "I was simply a looker-on among a thousand others. But I tell you what, fellows, it was something worth looking at. It was something I sha'n't forget as long as I live."

"I bet you won't," returned Tom. "How did the Huns look?"

"They didn't look as though they enjoyed it much," returned Frank. "In fact, they looked very much like men who were going to be stood up before a firing squad. One of them reached out his hand to Colonel Pavet, but the colonel was looking over his head just at that moment and somehow failed to see it. He was very polite though. You know the Frenchmen are great sticklers when it comes to matters of etiquette and form."

"How long have the Heinies got to decide whether they'll sign the armistice or not?" asked Tom.

"The colonel told me that they'd have three

days," answered Frank. "Let's see, yesterday was the seventh of November. Today's the eighth. They'll get there some time this morning. That will give them till the eleventh to sign, next Monday morning."

"Suppose they don't sign it?" suggested Tom gloomily.

"So much the worse for them then," answered Frank. "Instead of losing their boots and shirts they'll lose their hides as well. But they'll sign all right, never fear. The colonel says that they're running around in Berlin like wild men. Ludendorff has resigned and the Kaiser has left Berlin to go to the army headquarters at Spa for protection. The Crown Prince is afraid to be seen in the streets. You see the Heinies have been fed up on lies so long that now they're learning they're licked they're going crazy. And naturally they're turning on the men who have been lying to them. Oh, it's quite a different Berlin now from the one that hung out the flags and rang the bells when they heard that the *Lusitania* had been sunk and a lot of women and babies drowned."

"Well now *we've* got some news," said Tom with a sober face, "and it isn't very good news either."

"What is it?" asked Frank in quick alarm as his thoughts turned instantly to his absent chum.

"Don't tell me that anything has happened to Bart."

"He isn't dead," Billy hastened to explain. "But he's disappeared from the hospital."

"Disappeared?" replied Frank in dismay. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why," said Billy, "it seems that he has been out of his head. You know he was delirious the last time we saw him. Well, one of the fellows who was in the hospital with him came back to duty last night and told us that about three days ago when the nurse's back was turned, Bart slipped out of a door or a window, and when the nurse came back he wasn't there. Nobody saw him go and nobody has the least idea what has become of him."

Frank was unspeakably shocked by the news. Bart had become to him little less than a brother and the various experiences they had been through together since they had been in the army had strengthened and deepened this feeling.

"But what could have happened to him?" he asked desperately. "What will become of him? It's horrible to think of his wandering around in this forsaken stretch of country. He may wander into the German lines and be shot or taken prisoner."

"I don't think that," said Billy soothingly. "The chances are all against it. He'd have to pass

through our lines to do it and it's dollars to doughnuts that he couldn't do it without being seen. At any minute we may hear that he's been found and taken back to the hospital. At any rate, we know that the wound he got didn't kill him and while there's life there's hope."

"Yes," said Tom, who for once felt that it was up to him to look on the bright side of things in view of his friend's evident distress, "Bart's worth a dozen dead men yet. Think how many things he's been through and yet turned up as right as a trivet. Keep up your spirits and hope for the best."

They spoke with a confidence that they were far from feeling, for they knew what they refrained from telling Frank that a most careful search had already been made without disclosing the slightest trace of Bart's whereabouts.

Frank was badly shaken by the news he had heard and it was fortunate for him that the work that yet lay before the army was such as to engross his mind and keep him from brooding.

For the Allied commanders were taking no chances. They knew too much of German duplicity to rely on their good faith in any matter. The nation that regarded solemn treaties as "scraps of paper" was not to be trusted in the slightest particular. Only when the mad dog of Europe should be finally tied and muzzled could

the Allies afford to relax their efforts in any degree.

So the word had gone forth that for the next three days the fighting should be pushed as sternly and unrelentingly as ever.

The Germans on their side had an especial reason to make as good a showing as possible while the terms were being debated. If they could show that they were further from collapse than the Allies had supposed, the latter might be willing to moderate their demands.

So for three days more the fighting continued with unabated bitterness. And the Allies were not to be denied. In every part of the wide-flung battle line they kept on winning. And in the Argonne and on the Meuse, where the Americans were winding up their task, those days marked a succession of victories. The war was ending in a blaze of glory for the forces of civilization.

Monday morning came at last, the 11th of November, 1918, when the whole world was listening for news. And the news came. It sped across the ocean cables, it flashed through the air by wireless, it set the bells ringing and the whistles shrieking in every part of the Allied world, it sent the people of Paris and London and Rome and New York into the streets in thankful and rejoicing throngs, it thrilled both hemispheres and all the continents. Only in the capi-

tals of the Central Powers did it sound like the knell of doom.

It came, too, to the battlefronts, came in a clarion note of bugles that woke the men from sleep.

"What is it?" asked Tom sleepily.

"It's too early for reveille," grumbled Billy.

"Wake up, you boobs!" cried Frank joyously. "The armistice is signed! The war is over!"

# CHAPTER XV

## ON TO THE RHINE

It would have been hard to analyze the feeling of the Army Boys when the meaning of it all dawned upon them.

Their first feeling was that of satisfaction at work well done. Uncle Sam had sent them over to finish the job. Well, they had finished it.

Their next sensation was that of delight at having accomplished the downfall of the Huns. They had saved the world from slavery to the most brutal nation that the modern world had known.

Then there was the feeling that at last they could be free from the daily danger of wounds and death. They had risked this freely and gladly as long as it was necessary. Yet life was sweet and they were young.

"I told you they'd sign," exclaimed Frank as as he gave Tom a resounding thump on the back. "Now what have you got to say for yourself, you old croaker?"

"I'm the goat," admitted Tom with a joyous grin. "Josh all you like. I'm too happy to want

to come back at you. But don't forget," he added, as a thought struck him, "that they may back out yet. They're the greatest crawfishes on earth."

"Not a chance," chimed in Billy. "They're down and out. Gee, wouldn't you like to be in little old Camport this minute? Can't you see them all out on the streets and the laughing and the crying and the shaking hands and all the rest of it?"

"Just wait till the old Thirty-seventh goes swinging through the Camport streets," gloated Tom. "They'll give us the town. Nothing will be too good for us."

"We'll surely be It with a capital I," agree Frank happily. "If only good old Bart could be with us," he added, and a shadow came over his face.

"That's the one fly in the ointment," admitted Billy. "But he will be with us and don't you forget it. He's liable to turn up any minute."

"And now that the fighting is over, we may have a chance to look for him ourselves," put in Tom. "It stands to reason he can't be very far from here. But now let's go to chow. We ought to have an extra good meal this morning with a lot of victory sauce to season it."

They found the rest of the regiment as wildly excited as they were themselves, and there was a

perfect Babel of voices as the matter was discussed in all its bearings.

"Look at the fellows' faces," chuckled Billy. "They're like so many full moons."

"Rather different from what they were when the Germans seemed to have the upper hand in the Spring," grinned Frank. "If any one then had told us that the Germans would have caved in before Christmas, we'd have thought he was crazy. But here it isn't Thanksgiving yet and they've cried quits."

"I suppose there'll be a little more fighting yet this morning," said Tom hopefully. "You know the armistice doesn't go into force until eleven o'clock."

"Hear the glutton," chaffed Frank. "He hasn't got enough fighting yet. He wants to get another crack at the Hun."

"I suppose there will be a show of fighting until the last minute," said Billy. "But I guess it will be a matter of form. The artillery will open up but they'll fire wild. There'll be just enough to show that the army's on the job."

Billy was right. The morning wore away in a desultory fashion, with every man looking at his wrist watch every five minutes until eleven o'clock approached. Then when the moment came, all the big guns let go at once in one tremendous salvo that seemed as though it would split the heavens.

The war was over!

The silence that followed was the most curious sensation that the Army Boys had known. Day and night, the guns had been growling for months, sometimes faintly, sometimes strongly, but always growling. Now all along that vast battle line of five hundred miles there was that moment of blessed silence for which those millions of men had been waiting and fighting. The end of the long agony had come.

Frank, Billy, and Tom dropped their rifles and looked at each other. Usually they were talkative enough, but just now they were too full for words.

Over the hill in front of them appeared a group of German soldiers. They advanced a little, then hung back, then advanced again, and made signs that indicated that they wanted to talk with the Americans. But they were waved sternly back. The Americans wanted to have nothing to do with them.

The strictest rules had been laid down by the American officers that there was to be no fraternizing with the enemy. While hostilities had ceased, the war was still formally regarded as being on until the actual treaty of peace was signed. It might yet be necessary to take up arms again, and the Americans were going to take no chance of German propaganda getting in its nefarious work.

"A mighty good rule it is too," commented Frank, as he saw the discomfited Germans slink back into their own lines. "If those fellows had played the game fairly and gallantly as we played it, I'd be the first one to shake hands with them after the fighting was over and let bygones be bygones. But there isn't a decent rule of civilized warfare that they haven't violated. I'd as soon shake hands with a rattlesnake."

"I didn't know a rattlesnake had hands," gurgled Billy, and dodged the pass that Frank made at him.

"Well, now that the fighting is over, what's the next thing on the program?" asked Tom.

"Where do we go from here, boys,
Where do we go from here?"

chanted Billy.

"That's a question for our officers to settle," remarked Frank. "Of course we'll all go back to the good old U. S. A. eventually. At that, it will be a tremendous job to get over two million men back to the States. But I imagine a good many of us will have to stay over here and do police duty until the peace treaty is signed. Let's go down to the headquarters bulletin board and see just what the armistice terms are. That may give us a little light on the subject."

The men had been given liberty now to leave the ranks, and they found a great crowd gathered about a number of bulletin boards where the printed terms of the armistice had been posted. So great was the throng that they found difficulty in getting near the announcements.

"Here," said Frank giving Tom a push. "You've got gall enough to get in anywhere. Buck the line and come back with the dope."

Tom obeyed and wormed his way through the crowd until he got a good view of a board. He jotted down some of the main points and came back with his eyes bulging.

"We're going to the Rhine, fellows!" he exclaimed. "We're going to the Rhine!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MARCH OF TRIUMPH

"How do you know?" asked Frank, as he and Billy made a grab for the piece of paper on which Tom had jotted down his notes.

"Leave that alone," said Tom, holding it out of reach. "I had the work of getting this stuff and I'm going to have the pleasure of telling you the news."

"Get busy then," adjured Billy impatiently.

"Before I tell you anything else," said Tom, "listen to this: The Kaiser's skipped."

"What?" they exclaimed in chorus.

"Straight goods," vowed Tom. "He ran away like a cur. He didn't even wait till the armistice was signed. He struck out like a coyote for Holland yesterday. He had a special train waiting for him."

"Yellow all through!" exclaimed Frank in disgust.

"He's a hero—I don't think," remarked Billy.

"They say that the crowd in Holland guyed him something awful while he was at the Eysden

railroad station," went on Tom. "Told him that wasn't the road to Paris and a lot of other little things like that."

"What's become of the Clown Prince?" grinned Frank.

"Oh, he's skipped too, just the same as papa," laughed Tom. "They don't know just yet where he's gone to, but he's also among the missing."

"They're a precious pair," grunted Billy. "But it won't do them any good. The Allies will get after them yet and yank them out of their holes."

"We'll hope so," said Frank. "I'd like to have them both put in a cage and exhibited in every city of the world. But let's lay off his royal nibs and get down to brass tacks. How do you know we're going to the Rhine?"

"I don't exactly know that *we* are," confessed Tom. "But I do know that a big army of our men are going, and it stands to reason that since we're the nearest to the Rhine, we'll be in the bunch. At any rate, even if our special regiment isn't going, I don't think we'll have any trouble in taking the place of some of the others who would rather go back to the States right away. Are you game to go if we can make it? I am."

"Same here," ejaculated Billy.

"I am too," said Frank a little more slowly. "The only thing is that under other circumstances I'd be anxious to get home on my mother's ac-

count. But I've got to stay over here anyway until her property affairs are all closed up. So I'm with the rest of the bunch."

"Good!" said Tom and Billy in one breath.

"You see it's this way," went on Tom, referring to his notes. "The Allies are going to occupy all the German territory on this side of the Rhine. Then in certain parts they're going to cross the Rhine. You see there are three great crossings, one at Coblenz, one at Mayence and another at Cologne. The Allies are going to occupy a bridgehead eighteen miles in size on the other side of the Rhine at these crossings. That'll cage up the Heinies so that they couldn't get back into France and Belgium even if they wanted to."

"Won't they feel sore to have Allied soldiers on the sacred soil of Germany!" grinned Billy.

"And have to take off their hats every time the *Star Spangled Banner* is played," laughed Frank. "I tell you it will be a bitter pill for those fellows to swallow."

"It sure will," agreed Tom. "But wait till you hear the rest of the armistice terms. They've surely made a thorough job of it. They've taken away from Heinie everything except his shirt, and he'll have to borrow a barrel to go home in."

"Is it as bad as that?" chuckled Billy.

"Worse," replied Tom. "Just listen to this and judge for yourself. The Germans have got to give up five thousand heavy and light field guns, one thousand seven hundred airplanes, three thousand trench mortars, thousands of machine guns, all their submarines——"

"For the love of Pete!" interrupted Billy.

"All their submarines," went on Tom, "ten of the dreadnoughts, eight battle cruisers, six light cruisers, fifty destroyers, five thousand locomotives, one hundred and fifty thousand railroad cars, and a lot more things that I didn't have time to jot down. But that will give you some idea of what our victory means to us and what defeat means to them. It hasn't turned out a very profitable thing for the fellows that set out to loot the world, has it?"

"Well, it clinches the whole business anyway," remarked Frank. "It makes it impossible for Germany to resume the war even if she wanted to, and as far as that's concerned, the armistice is just as good as an actual treaty of peace."

"Exactly," agreed Billy. "I guess we've seen our last fighting."

"And it sure has been some fighting," observed Frank, as his thoughts went back over all the events of the last few months. "It's a miracle that we've lived through it."

"There have certainly been times when I

wouldn't have given a plugged nickel for our chances of coming out alive," agreed Billy, thoughtfully. "Oh, if only Bart was here to celebrate with us."

For the rest of that day they took the ease and comfort that they had so richly earned. The camp rules were relaxed and it was a general holiday. They were conscious of an immense weariness of body, as the reaction came from the strain under which they had so constantly labored, but their mental exhilaration was so great that they were supremely happy. It was a curious experience to be able to walk erect in perfect security, without having to crouch behind a tree or a trench or throw themselves to the ground at the approach of a shell. It was a day of peace and they enjoyed it beyond measure from the contrast with the terrible days that had gone before.

But the next morning a stir ran through the regiment. The old Thirty-seventh had been chosen as one of the units of the Army of Occupation. The news ran like wildfire through every company and there was a furbishing of arms and a rattle of harness and all the myriad sounds of a regiment on the move.

"I told you we'd be chosen," chortled Tom. "When you're looking for a prophet don't pass me by."

"You hit the nail on the head all right," admitted Billy.

"Now we'll relieve the Heinies from their task of watching the Rhine," laughed Frank. "From this time on it will be strictly an American river."

By noon of that day all preparations were completed. The old Thirty-seventh took its place in the line, the bands struck up, and with Old Glory floating proudly overhead the long column swung off toward the line of the German border.

# CHAPTER XVII

## FRIENDS OR FOES?

THE ARMY BOYS marched on with light hearts and swinging steps in the front rank of their regiment. It was a perfect day, with just enough snap in the crisp air to bring the blood to their cheeks and make marching a delight. There was no more fighting to be done, no batteries to storm, no machine gun nests to be rooted out, no more danger of maiming and death.

Despite this, however, there was no lack of military precautions on the part of their officers. Engineers went first to see that bridges were in shape for crossing and to detect and explode hidden mines before the main body of the troops came along. There were also chemical experts to test the water of the wells and see that they were not defiled or poisoned. Such precautions would have been unnecessary for some foes, but the Americans knew with whom they had to deal.

Above the marching columns swayed a number of observation balloons from which the observers were able to see miles ahead of the troops

and note how fast the enemy withdrew. Later on, these were joined by a flock of airplanes.

It had been arranged that the Germans should withdraw keeping a certain number of miles ahead of the advancing American troops. For the sake of avoiding any unfortunate clashes, this distance was enough as a rule to keep the opposing forces out of sight of each other, but at times, when the American forces mounted a hill, they could see in the distance a long line of German soldiers wending their way in the direction of the Rhine.

"Not the kind of home trip that they expected to make," grinned Tom. "They thought that they'd strut into Germany with our scalps hanging to their belts."

"Don't worry," laughed Frank. "I'll bet right now they're telling each other that they really licked us. They're the greatest self-kidders in existence. Their minds are cross-eyed. They never see anything straight. You see if when those fellows reach Germany the people don't come out to meet them as conquering heroes. It's a great system. You win when you lose."

"They remind me of the story of the fellow who boasted that he had kept the other fellow down by firmly inserting his nose between his adversary's teeth," chuckled Billy. "But look at these fellows coming along the road in rags. By Jove, they're Americans too!"

"They're prisoners, let loose by the Germans!" exclaimed Frank. "And look at their faces! They're nothing but skin and bones! That's what the Germans have done to them."

The poor fellows in question were gathered in at once and given food and medical attention. They had harrowing tales to tell of their experiences in German prison pens, of hunger and brutality and abuse that made the blood of their hearers boil.

"And to think of the way we fattened up the prisoners that were in our hands!" exclaimed Tom bitterly. "When I look at these poor fellows it makes me sorry the war is over. I'd like to get just one more crack at the Huns."

The men had been turned out without food or sufficient clothing that morning or the day before to find their way back to their lines as best they might. They were met in increasing numbers as the lines advanced and it was lucky for the Germans that the army that looked on these sights did not have the fixing of the terms of the peace treaty in their hands.

They camped that night in a little village from which the Germans had withdrawn only a little while before. The inhabitants were all out in the streets to meet them with tears of joy running down their faces as they welcomed their deliverers. For four years they had been under

the harsh and pitiless rule of the invaders, and their joy now bordered on frenzy. They had drawn out from their hiding places the French flags that they had treasured through all that four years of slavery and now they waved from every window.

The band struck up the *Star Spangled Banner* and every hat was lifted. Then suddenly, at a signal from the leader, the band swung into the Marseillaise. Then the scene beggared description. How long it had been since these French people had heard those glorious strains! How often in those weary years they had despaired of ever hearing them again! From grown men to children, the whole population was sobbing. They grasped the hands of the soldiers and tried to kiss them.

The emotion was contagious, and most of the husky doughboys felt a strange dampness about their eyes.

"Well," said Frank, when he could trust himself to speak, "just this one thing, if nothing else, would pay me for whatever I've done or suffered since I came to France."

And this experience was paralleled in every French town through which they passed. Everywhere it was the same story of oppression, of robbery, of slavery, of men deported against all the laws of war to toil in German fields or factories,

of girls torn from the arms of shrieking mothers and carried off, never to be seen or heard of again, of cruelty just for the sake of cruelty. And now that the Germans had been driven out in ignominy and defeat, these stalwart young Americans who had helped so largely to compass that defeat were looked upon almost in the light of demi-gods. Nothing was too good for them, although the scanty means of the people were pathetically small. Attentions were showered upon them. Little school children stood in rows and shyly held out bouquets of flowers. A hideous nightmare had been lifted from the land.

The plan of the advance called for two days of marching and then two days of rest. Everything moved with military precision and the schedule was strictly maintained. Now and then they saw some Germans in uniform, but these were members of the medical corps who had been left behind, by agreement with the Allies, to take care of such German wounded as could not be moved. At other times, a car would drive up with some group of German officers who found it necessary to consult with the American officers about some matter connected with the fulfilment of the terms of armistice. But in general, that hated field gray uniform was conspicuous by its absence.

Soon the Americans had crossed the French

border and reached the province of Luxemburg. Here there was a grand review of the troops. The Grand Duchess of Luxemburg stood on a balcony of the palace in company with General Pershing and received the salutes of the soldiers as they marched past. It was a beautiful city, and the Army Boys were not sorry when they learned that they were to stay there for two days before resuming their march.

"It'll seem good to get out from a tent and sleep under a roof again," remarked Frank.

"I've rather got fed up with tent life myself," agreed Billy. "I wonder where they're going to put us up?"

"I don't care much," observed Tom, "provided that the beds are clean and the grub is good."

On consulting their billet they found that they had been assigned to a house in the suburbs of the town. They had little difficulty in finding it, and were pleased to see that the house was a substantial one, where the food and beds on which Tom had laid stress were likely to be good.

"I wonder if they talk English?" said Frank, as they rang the bell.

"It doesn't matter much whether they do or not," replied Tom. "I'm pretty good at the sign language when it comes to getting something to eat. You'll notice that I didn't go hungry in Paris."

The door was opened by a maid, who ushered them into a pleasant and tastefully decorated living room, while she took the billet to her mistress.

While they were waiting for the latter to appear, two young girls passed the living room door. One was a brunette and the other of a blonde type, but both were undeniably pretty. They evidently had not been apprised of the presence of strangers in the house, for when they caught sight of the boys in uniform they seemed slightly startled and hurried up the stairs.

"Peaches!" murmured Tom when they were out of earshot.

"They're not hard to look at," agreed Frank carelessly.

"And we're only going to stay here two days," mourned Billy. "Hardly time enough to get acquainted. I hope they're able to talk English."

"Frank's got a chance in two languages," said Tom enviously. "He always was a lucky dog."

Their chaffing was interrupted by the entrance of their hostess. Frank acted as spokesman of the party and spoke in French, as he thought he would be more likely to be understood. But he was surprised and somewhat disconcerted when the lady told him in perfect English that she did not understand French, and looked appealingly to Tom and Billy. Frank changed at once into

his native tongue, with a laughing explanation, and the conversation soon grew easy and unconstrained. Their new hostess stated that her name was Edsall and that she was a widow. Her family consisted of two daughters, Helen and Alice, and her father, who was infirm and advanced in years. The family was American but had been residing abroad for years. She would be glad to make their stay as comfortable as possible.

She called the servant and had them shown to their rooms which they found pleasant and well furnished. They spent an unusual amount of time on brushing up, and it would not have required a very shrewd guess to determine that this special care was not without reference to the two pretty girls whom they knew they were to meet at table.

When they were summoned to supper, they found all the members of the family assembled in the dining room. They were introduced to the girls and to the old father. The latter had a worried look in his sunken eyes, and kept muttering to himself at times in a way that made the boys feel that he was not altogether right in his mind, and this made them think of the missing Bart.

The supper was good and well served, and they were soon chatting pleasantly together. Tom was especially attentive to Alice, the brunette,

while Billy devoted himself to her blonde sister, Helen. Frank made himself generally agreeable, chatting with his hostess and occasionally addressing himself to the old man. The latter would arouse himself and make some reply which showed that he had not fully grasped what Frank had been saying. Then he would relapse into his moody muttering, and Frank, for fear of embarrassing him, finally left him to himself.

Suddenly something that Helen was saying to Billy caught Frank's attention.

"Yes," she remarked, "when we were living in Coblenz—"

"Coblenz!" ejaculated Billy. "Why that's in Germany!"

"Certainly," she replied in some wonderment. "Why, what of it?"

Frank caught a warning look that her mother directed at Helen.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A PERPLEXING QUESTION

"WHY, nothing," stammered Billy, a trifle embarrassed. "I didn't know that you had ever been in Germany."

"Didn't mother tell you?" asked Helen. "We lived in Coblenz for years."

Here Mrs. Edsall intervened.

"I didn't mention it," she said quietly, "because it is a matter of no importance. Yes, we did live in Germany for some years before the war broke out. My father had come over from America to take charge of a branch importing house at Coblenz. My husband had died, and we came with my father. When the war started, or rather when we saw that it was about to begin, we left Germany and came here, where we have lived ever since."

She changed the subject then and the conversation went on, but it was now constrained and formal. From time to time the boys shot a glance at each other that was full of interrogation. And as soon as the meal was finished, they excused

themselves and went to Frank's room where they were soon in earnest conversation.

"What do you think of it?" asked Tom in much perplexity.

"I don't know what to think," confessed Frank. "It may be all right and it may be all wrong. But one thing's certain, and that is that we've got to be on our guard. Those infernal Germans have spies everywhere and we may be in a nest of them. We want to keep as mum as oysters about all military affairs."

"It doesn't seem as though a nice girl like that Helen could be a spy," said Billy regretfully.

"Nor Alice," put in Tom.

"Maybe they're not," admitted Frank. "In fact, I'm pretty sure they're not, or Helen wouldn't have made that break about living in Coblenz. It's the last thing they'd have wanted us to know. But I'm not so sure of the mother. I caught her sending a warning to Helen with her eyes, but it was too late."

"That may have been simply because she knew that it might make us supicious and she wanted to avoid that," defended Tom. "That would be natural enough for anyone to do. But it doesn't say that there is any ground for the suspicion."

"What do you think of the old man?" asked Frank thoughtfully.

"Oh, he's just crazy," said Tom carelessly. "He's touched in the upper story."

"That might be just camouflage though, to make us think that we could talk freely without paying any attention to him," objected Frank. "He may be as crazy as a fox."

"I don't think so," said Billy. "He's pretty old and his mind is failing. I heard him half a dozen times muttering something about 'the cellar, the cellar.' It got on my nerves after a while."

"Well, don't let's trouble trouble till trouble troubles us," counseled Frank. "There may be nothing in it at all. I wouldn't hang a yellow dog on all the evidence we've got. In the meantime, that bed looks inviting and I'm going to tumble in early."

"I'm with you there," said Tom. "It's so long since I've slept between sheets that I'm anxious to see how it feels."

It was indeed a delightful contrast to their experiences for months past, and they slept soundly until they were called to breakfast the next morning.

"What are we going to do with our leave today?" asked Frank, as they were hurriedly dressing.

"Just loaf and invite our souls," replied Tom, as he put down his military brushes and took a last look in the glass, with the fair Alice in mind.

"Luxemburg's a tidy little city," put in Billy, "and there ought to be lots to see. Wouldn't do, I suppose, to take the girls along."

"Not on your young life," said Frank emphatically. "You'd get in the guardhouse so soon it would make your head swim. What's the matter with you fellows, anyway? You've both been primping up like a couple of dudes. Are you so badly smitten?"

"Not at all," denied Tom stoutly, though a deeper flush on his bronzed face might have given rise to doubt.

"They're certainly nice girls though," said Billy, feebly, "especially Helen."

"She hasn't anything on Alice," remarked Tom.

"Lucky you haven't picked out the same one," laughed Frank, "or I'd have my hands full in keeping the peace. Come along now if you're ready."

At the breakfast table they received the same pleasant greeting as on the night before, but there was a certain lack of freedom in the conversation that all felt. The little element of suspicion that had been aroused by Helen's remark still persisted. The boys kept a guard on their lips as regarded all military matters, and as just at that time there was little to talk about except the war, the remarks made were few and far between and they felt relieved when the meal was finished. Perhaps Billy and Tom were exceptions, for although they did not say much with their lips, their

eyes were eloquent in the glances they stole at the girls.

It was necessary for the Army Boys to report at the quarters of the regiment, but after that formality was through with they had no difficuty in getting leave and started off in high feather to enjoy their unaccustomed freedom.

There was a host of places that well repaid their visit, museums, picture galleries, the quaint old world buildings, the great cathedral, and others equally noteworthy. It was such a relief to be among scenes of peace after the horrors and bloodshed of so many months that they enjoyed it doubly. They took their dinner at a hotel, where though the prices were high the food was surprisingly good, and toward evening returned to the home where they had been billeted.

As they neared the house, they saw a man loitering near it who seemed to have no special business in the vicinity, but kept sauntering to and fro smoking a cigar. As he saw them coming, he hesitated a moment as though half inclined to turn and go in the other direction, but seemed to think better of it, giving them a quick, sharp look as he passed them.

He was in civilian dress and at first they thought he was a native of the place, but his face showed that he was unmistakably an Englishman or an American, they were not sure which.

"Wonder what that fellow is hanging around here for?" Tom remarked, as they went up the steps of the house.

"Oh the streets are free—that is to every one but a German, and that chap isn't that," remarked Billy.

"Perhaps it's some lovelorn suitor of one of the girls," suggested Frank mischievously.

"I don't like his face," said Tom sourly.

"He has a villainous look," added Billy.

"Jealous already, eh?" laughed Frank. "I surely got your goat that time. He looks all right to me. I'd better get you fellows into the house before there's murder done."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LONE STRAGGLER

THE ARMY BOYS were getting ready for supper, and Frank noted with some amusement that under one pretext or another Tom and Billy took occasion to go frequently to the window and look out.

"Is he there yet?" he finally asked of Tom.

"Who?" asked Tom innocently.

"That deadly rival of yours," chaffed Frank.

Tom flushed a little.

"Quit your kidding," he replied. "Yes, he is there. I've half a mind to go out and ask him why's he hanging around."

"I guess that would be assuming a little too much," laughed Frank; and as the summons to supper came just then the matter was dropped.

"I hope you enjoyed your holiday today," remarked Mrs. Edsall, when they were seated at the table.

"Very much," Frank answered. "Luxemburg is a charming city. We only wish we were going to be in it longer."

"It is a nice place," said Mrs. Edsall. "But we shall be glad to leave it just the same."

"Are you going to leave it?" asked Billy in some surprise.

"Yes," replied his hostess. "We are going back to Coblenz. My father's property was seized there by the Germans when we left, and we are anxious to go back to reclaim it, now that the city is going to be under American control."

Tom and Billy did not attempt to disguise their pleasure at the news, but Frank, although he politely expressed himself to the same effect, was not without a certain uneasiness. All his doubts of the night before came back to him.

Was business the real reason why the family were returning? Or was it because their sympathies and affections called them back to German soil? It was certain that the old man, whatever he may have been when he left Coblenz four years before, was now in no shape to carry on business. Still, of course, the family would naturally want to get back their property, even if only to sell it and afterward go to America.

He stole a glance at the old man. The latter had brightened visibly when Coblenz had been mentioned, but he soon relapsed into his usual silence broken only by muttered references to "the cellar."

Frank made up his mind that he would speak

to his chums again about the matter. But after supper, the party adjourned to the living room, where the girls played and sang to them, and Billy and Tom were in such high spirits when the boys finally went up to their rooms that Frank concluded not to dampen their pleasure by bringing the matter up.

The next morning they took their leave, with many thanks for the hospitality that had been extended to them and expressions of hope that they would see them again in Coblenz. Billy and Tom laid especial stress on this latter point and Helen and Alice did not seem at all averse to the prospect.

The regiment started off again on its long "hike," refreshed and rested after its two days' stay in Luxemburg. Their journey soon brought them to the Moselle river with its quaint villages and picturesque castles and they pursued their way along its banks for many miles. They were not yet on German soil, though they were rapidly approaching it.

In every place they entered, they were received as deliverers. The people turned out in force to greet them with acclamations. And they all had American flags ready to wave in honor of the Americans. Many were not just sure how the flags ought to be made, and there were often as many stripes as there were stars. In some places

the people had no cloth, as almost every scrap of it had been carried away by the Germans, but they used paper instead, and although the results were not always artistic and in fact were sometimes laughable, none of the boys laughed, for they knew how deep the emotion was that prompted the demonstrations.

One day when they were taking their noonday rest of two hours, the boys saw Dick Lever coming toward them. They fell upon him with delight.

"Well, Dick, old man, is it really you?" asked Frank, after they had pounded and mauled him to their hearts' content.

"Nobody else," grinned Dick, as he released himself. "What kind of a rough house do you call this anyway?"

"How does it feel not to bring down your daily German?" laughed Billy.

"It sure is monotonous for a fact," said Dick, a little regretfully. "I find myself looking around every once in a while to see if one of them is bearing down on me. But there's no such luck. I'll get rusty after a while from lack of practice."

"You may have another hack at them, if they refuse to sign the peace treaty," suggested Tom.

"Swell chance," returned Dick. "We've taken all the fight out of those fellows. They haven't a bit left. Have you heard about the way they

surrendered their fleet? Some of the finest battleships in the world, and they gave them up like so many lambs. Think of an American navy giving up that way without one last desperate fight. But Heinie isn't built that way."

"How does it seem up there in the air to watch the American army marching toward the Rhine?" asked Tom.

"Bully," replied Dick. "I always felt certain I'd see them going in that direction but I didn't dare to hope it would be so soon. From up there I can see not only our boys but the Huns as well going back to explain how it happened that they were making tracks for Berlin instead of toward Paris, and I tell you the sight makes me feel mighty good.

"One funny thing I noticed yesterday," he went on. "Our whole army had passed on, or I thought they had, when I saw a man marching along about three miles behind them. He was all alone, but he was marching as stiff and straight as though his captain was looking at him. Then every once in a while he would stop and go through the whole manual of arms. Then up would go his gun again and he'd march on.

"It struck me as strange and I watched him for a while. He went through that performance a half dozen times. I got out my glasses for a better look and saw that he was ragged and

looked down at the heel. I had half a mind to go down and see what it all meant, but just then I got a signal from the flight commander and had to go forward. But it sure struck me as queer."

"Some straggler that had been left behind and was trying to catch up with his regiment, I suppose," suggested Billy.

"But that doesn't explain why he went through the drill movements," replied Dick.

Frank had been listening, carelessly at first but with growing interest. Now he leaned forward and asked earnestly:

"Did you see the man's face, Dick?"

"No, I was almost directly above him and he didn't look up."

"Dick," went on Frank with growing excitement, "do me a favor. Keep a sharp watch for that man and if you catch sight of him swoop right down and get in touch with him."

"Sure," answered Dick curiously, "but why?"

"Because," replied Frank, and his voice was tense, "it may be Bart!"

# CHAPTER XX

## ON GERMAN SOIL

THE boys sprang excitedly to their feet.

"Bart!" exclaimed Billy huskily.

"What makes you think that?" asked Tom.

"Of course, it's just a guess," explained Frank, "and I may be all wrong. But it seems to me it's a reasonable guess. From what Dick says, the man seems to be out of his head. No sane man would go through all those drill motions all by himself. And you know that Bart was always a crank on the manual of arms. There wasn't a quicker or smarter man at drill in the whole Thirty-seventh. We know that poor Bart was out of his head when he escaped from the hospital. What more natural than that his twisted ideas should go back to the very thing that he used to be most interested in?"

"By Jove, I shouldn't wonder if you might be right!" cried Billy.

"Then, too, what Dick said about his being ragged would chime in with that," exclaimed Tom. "If he were just an ordinary straggler

trying to catch up with the regiment, he'd be dressed all right anyway. You know how strict the officers are that the men should look smart. But poor Bart only had on his night clothes when he got away from the hospital, and he's probably picked up pieces of clothing here and there as he had a chance. Say, fellows, can't we get the officers to let us go back and look into the matter?"

"We'll try," said Frank, "but I'm afraid they'd think it was a wild goose chase. But at any rate, Dick is freer than we are and I'm sure he'll do the best he can for us. Won't you, Dick?"

"You bet I will," replied Dick warmly. "Poor Bart was a prince, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for him or for you. The more I think of it, the more I'm inclined to think that Frank may be right. There isn't a free minute when I won't be looking for the poor fellow."

"Even if it shouldn't be Bart, he ought to be taken care of," said Frank. "Just wait a minute, Dick, until I see the captain and try to get permission to go back with a squad and hunt him up."

He was off like a shot, but returned in a few minutes disappointed and chagrined. The captain had listened with sympathy, but the chance seemed to him too remote to depart from the strict orders he had received to keep all the regi-

ment together on this momentous march. He promised, however, to notify the rear guard to keep their eyes open, and if they caught sight of the straggler, if he were such, to gather him in. And with this promise Frank had to be content.

Dick left them with a repeated promise to do all he could, and the march was resumed with the Army Boys in a high state of excitement. In their hearts they knew that it was only a chance and that they might be doomed to bitter disappointment. But as Frank had said, it was at least a reasonable guess, and their hearts swelled with delight at the mere possibility of having dear old Bart back with them again. Even if his mind were wandering, they felt sure that with the care he would receive he would soon be himself again.

The absence of their comrade had been the one bitter drop in their cup of happiness over the beating of the Hun. Half the delight in the victory would be gone unless their loved comrade could share the triumph with them.

They could talk of little else all the rest of that day, and many a glance was directed at the fleet of aeroplanes flying overhead. One of these, they knew, was Dick's, and they were sure that that trusty friend was "on the job."

All that day they kept passing huge piles of war material that had been left behind by the Germans under the terms of armistice. There

were guns by the hundred, heavy and light. Most of them were camouflaged with all the colors of the rainbow. This had been unnecessary while the Germans were fighting in entrenched positions, but when the rapid advance of the Allies had forced the Germans to put up their guns hastily in the best positions they could find they had painted them in order to dazzle and bewilder the eyes of their enemies.

"All that good paint wasted," chuckled Billy, as he looked at the grim monsters, silent now, that a little while before had been belching out their messengers of death.

There were airplanes too, scores of them, some of them the famous "flying tanks," so called because they had a metal armor about them to ward off enemy bullets. The Army Boys looked at them with great curiosity and would have liked to stop to examine them at leisure, but had to keep on in the steadily marching ranks.

They could look across into Germany now, where on the other side of the river, the German forces were withdrawing. It was a strange sensation to see a German and not snatch up a gun to hurry his movements.

While they were pitching camp that night, Billy suddenly nudged Frank, as a man passed them in earnest conversation with one of the officers.

"Look at that fellow," he murmured.

Frank looked at the man indicated.

"Why it's the man we saw hanging around Mrs. Edsall's house!" he remarked with interest. "I wonder what he's doing here?"

"Seems to have the run of the camp all right," observed Tom with a scowl.

"Well, I guess that shows he's all right," returned Frank. "You've got no cause to kick, Tom, nor Billy either. You know now that he isn't hanging around the girls."

"No, but it looks as though he were going along with the army to Coblenz," said Billy uneasily.

"And the girls are going to be there soon, eh?" teased Frank. "Gee, but I'm glad that I'm not in love."

"Who said we were?" demanded Tom.

"Oh, nobody," laughed Frank. "I've got a pretty good pair of eyes in my head, though."

No news came from Dick that night, although the boys were looking for him to turn up at any moment. Either he had seen nothing of their missing comrade, or his duties had prevented him from joining them.

"Never mind," Frank consoled his comrades, when they were forced to turn in. "Tomorrow's a new day. My hunch is growing stronger that I was right about poor Bart."

The next day was the one fixed for the Army to enter Germany. At last they were reaching the goal that they had aimed at ever since they had come to France. The arrogant country that had sought to enslave Europe was to feel the foot of the victor on her own soil, that she had so haughtily declared to be "sacred."

They reached the bridge that had been designated for the crossing. Then with bands crashing out their martial music and the Stars and Stripes floating proudly overhead, the American Army swung across the bridge and entered as conquerors on German soil.

# CHAPTER XXI

## AS FROM THE DEAD

It was a good-sized city into which the army marched, and the streets were full of people. There were other thousands who peered from behind window curtains at the hated newcomers, these Americans, who, they had been told by their lying government, could never get to France, and who, if they did get there, would run at the sight of German uniforms. They *had* run, but they had run after the Germans instead of away from them, and that trifling fact had made all the difference in the world.

There was no demonstration of any kind. The people looked on in sullen silence. Only the children showed interest. They were too young to understand what the coming of the Americans meant to their elders, and the flying flags and stirring music appealed to them as a spectacle and delighted them.

The American authorities took charge of the town and issued proclamations telling the people just how they were to conduct themselves under

the American occupation. The ordinary business of the town was to go on as usual, and the civil authorities would not be interfered with as long as good order was maintained. After a certain hour at night, no citizen was to be allowed on the streets. American officers were to be saluted when they passed. Hats were to be lifted when the American flag appeared and when the American national air was played. The people were warned that the rules were to be strictly obeyed and that any disorder would be sharply and instantly repressed.

"And they're getting off mighty easy at that," grumbled Tom. "What we ought to do is to give them a taste of their own medicine. We ought to post up the same regulations here that the Germans did in the towns of France and Belgium."

"We couldn't do that," objected Frank. "They were brutes and those things came natural to them. But we're Americans."

"Of course, you're right," admitted Tom. "Just the same it makes my blood boil at the contrast between what they deserve and what they're getting. Look at these streets and houses, not showing a mark of war, and then picture the towns of France and Belgium, where only heaps of rubbish mark the passage of the Hun."

"Speaking of that," broke in Billy, "here's a

picture post-card that I picked up in the street a little while ago. It shows a group of Germans destroying the machinery in a French mill, smashing delicate and costly machinery to bits. The Germans had stopped working for a few minutes, so that they could be photographed and the pictures could be published in Germany. That's what it is that makes the case of the Huns so hopeless. If any other nation did such things, it wouldn't at least brag of it. But the Huns are actually proud of it. The dirtier the deed the greater the pride."

"Yes," replied Frank, "and I heard of a case where they sank lower still. After they had taken a picture of a mill they had broken up, very similar to this, they sent one of the pictures to the former French owner of the mill, and the picture had written on it: 'This is the way your mill looks now.' "

"Oh, well, what's the use," growled Billy. "We've licked them and licked them good and proper. We'll have to let it go at that, though I think as Tom does, that they ought to get a stiffer dose."

"One thing is certain," grunted Tom, "and that is if I'm a member of the provost-marshal's guard in this town, I'll make these fellows walk Spanish if they look cross-eyed at me."

But Tom had no chance for this, for in an-

other day or two the regiment went on, while other units of the division remained to garrison the town.

In the meantime, the boys had seen Dick, but to their disappointment he had no definite news for them. Only once more had he caught sight of the lonely figure, but while he was manœuvring his machine to make a descent the man had disappeared. He landed and made a search, but without result. Since that time he had kept a sharp lookout, but had seen no further trace of him.

"But I'll keep on looking," promised Dick. "I'm getting just as much excited about this mystery as you fellows are yourselves."

"Here's hoping," replied Frank. "But it wrings my heart to think of poor Bart, if it is he, wandering around in that forlorn way. I only wish that we could get off to look for him."

They were passing through the country districts now and the villages at which they stopped at night could not accommodate the men in their houses. These were occupied by the officers, while the men stayed in their tents.

The weather was getting colder, and the men had extra blankets served out to them. These were ample to keep them warm, but one morning Frank awoke shivering. Reveille had not yet sounded, and he turned over for another "forty

winks" and drew his blankets closer. But he was still chilly, and on investigation he found that one of his blankets had disappeared.

At first he thought that either Tom or Billy must have played a joke on him. He went over to where they lay, but they only had their regular quota, and they protested so vigorously against being disturbed that he let them alone. Later when he questioned them about the matter, they denied knowing anything about it.

"It must have been one of the fellows from another tent," suggested Billy. "He's felt cold in the night and has come in and swiped yours. Pretty small potatoes, I call it."

"I'd like to catch him doing it," growled Frank. "I'd make it so warm for him that he wouldn't feel any need of blankets."

"He's got his nerve with him to swipe things from the best boxer in the regiment," remarked Tom.

"You'd better bone the quartermaster for another blanket," counseled Billy.

Frank got another blanket in the course of the day and that night he tucked it in around him with unusual care. It would take some tugging to get that away from him.

It must have been considerably after midnight when he was conscious of something that disturbed him. But he was very tired, and after a

moment he turned over to go to sleep again. Then came a distinct tug at the blanket that had him awake in an instant.

It was very dark in the tent, but he could discern dimly the figure of a man standing beside him.

"Now," thought Frank grimly to himself, "my fine fellow, here's where you get the shock of your young life."

He gathered himself for a spring, leaped to his feet and grappled with the intruder. The latter tried to escape, but Frank launched himself into him with such impetus that they both went down together.

The head of the unknown struck the ground hard and he lay still. Frank was alarmed.

"Quick!" he called, as Tom and Billy, aroused by the fracas, rushed toward him. "Strike a match, one of you."

Billy did so, and as the light flashed upon the face of the prostrate man they gave a shout.

"Bart!"

## CHAPTER XXII

### A JOYOUS REUNION

"BART!" Frank repeated with a groan. "And perhaps I've killed him!"

Tom lighted a candle while Billy rushed for his canteen. They dashed some of its contents into Bart's pallid face and chafed his hands and wrists.

In a few minutes their vigorous efforts had results. Bart moved uneasily, his eyes opened and rested vacantly at first and then intelligently upon the faces of his friends.

"Hello, fellows!" he murmured weakly. "What's up?"

Their joy was beyond measure. Even while they were seeking to restore him to consciousness they had been tormented by the fear of seeing only an insane gleam in his eyes when he should open them.

"Bart, old man!" cried Frank, in a voice that broke despite all efforts to control it. "You know us, then?"

"Know you?" repeated Bart wonderingly and

trying to raise himself, a movement which they gently checked. "Of course I know you. Are you kidding me?"

"Listen, Bart," replied Frank with a warning glance at his companions not to reveal prematurely the whole story. "You got a knock on the head in the fighting that put you out of business for a while and we've been a little scared. But you're all right now."

"Sure, I'm all right," answered Bart, "and I'll be ready tomorrow to take another crack at the Huns. How is the battle going?"

"All to the good," answered Frank. "But you'd better lie still for a while. We'll put you on my bed and you won't have even a headache in the morning."

Bart protested, but they overruled him and tucked him in the blankets, where he promptly went to sleep. Then Frank went in search of one of the doctors who came promptly. He listened with the greatest interest while the three chums told their story. Then he made as careful an examination of Bart as he could without waking him.

"He'll be all right, I think," was his verdict. "He's fairly well nourished. I suppose he's found plenty of food in the wake of the army. And the life in the open air has built him up after his hospital experience. The only trouble has

been with his mind, and from what you tell me he's come to himself again. Of course he'll have to take things easy for the next few days and you mustn't tell him now about his hospital escapade. Let him think the injury happened to him yesterday. We'll take him along in one of the ambulances, and I venture to say that in a week he'll be with you again as well as ever."

"I can't forgive myself for knocking him down," said Frank mournfully.

The doctor laughed.

"Best thing you ever did in your life," he said. "The blow he got on the head was just what he needed to shake him into sanity again. Medical history is full of just such cases. You've got the proof of it right here. He was undoubtedly insane when he came into the tent to take your blanket. He knew that he was cold and his only thought was to get something to keep him warm."

"But why should he happen to strike our tent instead of somebody else's?" asked Billy.

"Because he knew it was yours," answered the doctor. "In his poor twisted brain he had recognized you and knew vaguely that you were his friends. Probably he has been dodging around somewhere and kept track of you."

The boys' eyes grew moist as the pathos of it all came upon them.

The doctor left them some stimulating medi-

cine, promised to send the ambulance around in the morning and took his leave.

There was no more sleep for the boys the rest of that night. They were strung to too high a pitch of excitement and delight. They felt as though they were treading on air.

Bart was back with them again, dear old Bart, whose absence they had mourned as though he had been their brother, brave old Bart, with the the heart of a lion, who had stood at their side in a score of desperate fights. For hours they sat outside the tent so that they would not disturb the sleeper, and talked in low voices of the great thing that had happened.

Bart woke in the morning refreshed and perfectly himself again as far as his mind was concerned. They fed him well and when the ambulance came around they helped to put him in it, promising to drop round to see him whenever they could get leave. The ambulance went along with the army, so that the boys had the feeling that Bart was with them all the time, even though not stepping along in the ranks.

Dick dropped in on them during the day, as did Will Stone, who was going along in one of the tank units of the army of occupation, and their delight was almost as great as that of the Army Boys themselves when they heard the news. Together they went to visit Bart at every oppor-

tunity they had, and rejoiced to find that he was getting stronger all the time.

The nurse who had him in charge had been told his story, and, being a person of tact and discretion, she had gradually told him the truth bit by bit, "in homeopathic doses," as Tom put it. The absence of the noise of the big guns was rather hard to explain, but she did it somehow, and finally Bart came to know the whole truth. It was something of a shock to him, but his delight at the defeat and surrender of the Huns was so great that it more than counterbalanced his distress.

In a few days, the doctor pronounced him strong enough to take his regular place in the ranks, and when he stepped out with them one morning in a brand new uniform and looking as stalwart and fit as ever he had, the Army Boys felt as though they had nothing on earth left to ask for. And their delight was shared by the rest of the regiment, with whom Bart was a general favorite, and who overwhelmed him with handshakes and congratulations. The boys marked that day as the best that had ever been on their calendar.

All were in a jubilant mood as they strode along in the crisp, cool air. It was almost a trial to keep their measured step. They all felt more like dancing.

"The only kick I have was that I wasn't in at the finish," said Bart. "I'd like to have heard the last shot fired. And I sure would have liked to have been with you fellows in the tunnel, and in the clearing of that Argonne Forest. You fellows were certainly going fast in those last days of the war."

"You needn't kick," grinned Billy. "You're some speed merchant yourself. You went to sleep in France and woke up in Germany."

## CHAPTER XX

### CROSSING THE RHINE

It was a memorable day when the Army Boys at last looked upon the Rhine. Again and again that word had been on their lips in the course of the war. A thousand times they had pledged themselves to reach the Rhine. The river was to them a symbol of Germany itself.

Into the city of Coblenz poured the American army in columns that seemed endless. Over the Rhine they went on two bridges that spanned the great river that stretched out like a broad silver ribbon as far as their eyes could see. At last the Rhine was under American control, and a German could not even cross it without permission from an American sentry.

On the other side of the river from Coblenz was the great fortress of Ehrenbreirstein, one of the strongest and most famous in Germany. It covered many acres and stood on a rocky promontory, four hundred feet above the level of the river. It could hold a hundred thousand men if necessary. It had cisterns hewed out of the solid

rock that could hold water enough to supply a garrison of eight thousand men for ten years. There were mammoth underground passages and magazines for supplies and ammunition. From its rocky height it seemed to be able to defy the world.

The German flag had floated over the fortress for a hundred years. Now Old Glory was hoisted in its place and the pulses of the boys thrilled as the Stars and Stripes spread out proudly in the breeze.

Part of the army was stationed in Coblenz, but many thousands were placed in the fortress itself, which was henceforth to serve as American barracks.

Then for the first time since they had landed in France the American army really rested. Their main work was done and well done. They had fought the good fight. They had kept the faith.

Not that the army discipline grew lax. The men were kept in shape for any emergency. At a day's notice if necessary they could resume fighting. But there were many hours every day that they had to themselves and they were as full of high spirits as so many colts turned out to pasture.

On one such day after they had had some good wrestling and boxing matches Billy's effervescence found vent in an offer to sing them a song

"so pathetic that it will bring tears to your eyes."

"Oh, cut out that stuff," chaffed Bart. "Isn't there enough trouble in the world without your singing songs to make us weep?"

"Aw, this isn't going to be the kind of a song you think it is," protested Billy. "This song isn't aimed to make you shed tears of sadness, the one and only idea being to double you up with spontaneous and irresistible laughter. You've heard the old saying, haven't you, 'to laugh till you cry'? Of course you have, and that's what I have in mind."

"I never knew you had a gift for singing comic songs," said Tom, suspiciously, "and what's more, I don't mind going a little further and saying I didn't know you could sing any kind of a song at all."

"That just goes to show how ignorant you are," retorted Billy, "you just wait till you hear me sing this song, and see if it isn't every bit as good as I say it is."

"What's the name of this wonderful composition?" asked Tom.

"The name?" said Billy. "Why, I don't see any real reason why I shouldn't tell you. The name of this song is: 'I Want a Good Egg, and I Want It Bad.' The accompaniment will be rendered——" but this was as far as he got, as a shout of laughter went up, and he became the

target for whatever miscellaneous objects happened at that moment to be closest to hand.

"The title to that song is plenty," observed Frank, when the disturbance had somewhat quieted down; "speaking for myself, I'm not curious to see if the music is as bad as the egg."

"That's just it," said Billy, aggrievedly, "it isn't as bad, it's worse. That's what makes the song so funny."

"The trouble is," said Tom, "that you're about the only one in this man's army who does like it, so I'd advise you to drop it while you're still alive and healthy."

"Oh, all right, then," said Billy, "if you fellows haven't got sense enough to recognize a little musical gem when it is offered to you, you can go without. But please remember that you're the losers, not me."

"It's nice of you to feel sorry for us," said Frank, "but just you save up that song to sing to a bunch of Boches. Of course it will be hard even on the Huns, but they're used to atrocities by this time."

"That's a good idea," said Billy in an injured tone. "I know a German isn't much good, but with all their faults they do appreciate good music."

"Yes, but we weren't talking about *good* music," remarked Bart pointedly.

"I don't seem to make a hit with this crowd," said Billy plaintively. "One of you fellows see if you can do better."

"I heard a good joke the other day," volunteered Tom, "and I wouldn't mind telling it if somebody coaxed me a little bit."

"Consider yourself coaxed," said Bart. "Go ahead and shoot the works."

"Well," said Tom, "it seems that in one of the recruiting camps an officer was questioning some of the men with an idea of finding out what they would do in a certain emergency. As he went down the line, he came to a darky.

" 'Now, 'Rastus,' the officer said, 'suppose you were out in an open field on scouting duty, and suddenly you saw a whole regiment of Germans running toward you, bayonets fixed and ready for business. What would you do?'

" 'Whut would ah do? Why, boss, ah wouldn't do a thing. Ah'd just say tuh mah feet: "Feet, do yuh duty," and, boss, ah'm mighty suah dey would.' "

# CHAPTER XXIV

## THE CELLAR

A BURST of laughter greeted the climax of Tom's story.

"And now," said Bart, "I propose that we wander over to the canteen and proceed to wrap ourselves around some apple pie and a few large and succulent doughnuts."

The proposition met with instant acclaim, and without further debate the boys streamed off to the canteen where were sold the delicacies that made a special appeal to the soldiers after the regulation "chow." They found the place crowded, but there was always room for more, and they squeezed their way in and demanded that the man behind the counter "shake a mean foot" and place before them the required "eats." This was done, and big chunks of pie disappeared in magical fashion.

"Wow!" exclaimed Billy, with a deep sigh of satisfaction. "If I ever get back home again, I'm going to enter myself in a pie-eating contest. I'll probably become champion of the world, but

even if I'm not, it will be an awful lot of fun trying."

"The rest of us would run you a pretty good race," grinned Tom.

"You think so, eh?" Billy came back at him. "All right, I'll challenge you all as soon as we get back to the States and may the best man win."

"The loser of course to pay the bill," laughed Bart.

"Agreed," replied Billy, "and now just to keep in training I'll take another piece of that pie. Shoot it over, waiter, and make it snappy."

At last even Billy's voracious appetite was satisfied.

"Come along now, you cormorant," said Tom. "You know we've got that appointment in Coblenz this afternoon and we haven't got any too much time."

"Are you fellows going across the river this afternoon?" asked Frank in some surprise.

"Why, yes," said Tom, with a slight tinge of embarrassment. "Don't you want to come along?"

Frank looked from Tom to Billy and a light broke in upon him.

"Not I," he laughed. "I'm next to you fellows. Trot along and give my regards to Helen and Alice. I didn't know the family had reached

Coblenz yet. But trust you fellows to find that out."

Billy and Tom smiled a little sheepishly.

"They got there yesterday," Billy explained.

"Bless you, my children, bless you," said Frank mockingly. "Run along now and don't keep the girls waiting. But all the same, fellows," he added more seriously, "don't get in too deep until you know that they're loyal to the old U. S. A."

"I'd stake my life on it," replied Billy warmly.

"No doubt," laughed Frank, "but just now, old man, you may not be a very good judge. Only be careful, that's all."

Two days later there was a grand review of the Army of Occupation. General Pershing himself had come to Coblenz for that purpose and the marching and countermarching of that great array of troops on a plain outside the city was a magnificent spectacle.

But the great feature of the day to the Army Boys was when they and a number of others were called out in front of the entire division and decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross. Frank got his for "extraordinary heroism," as the citation called it, in capturing the machine gun and its crew single handed. Tom and Billy were honored for their exploit in the tunnel affair while Bart was decorated for the occasion when in company with Frank he had rowed out into

the river and blown up the bridge over which the Germans were charging. The General himself pinned on the medals, and it was a proud group of Army Boys who trudged back to their quarters with the honors on their breasts after the review was ended.

They had done these things without the slightest thought of reward and simply because they loved their country. But it was good all the same to feel that Uncle Sam was not ungrateful.

Before they left the field, Frank had another pleasure. Colonel Pavet came over to him and congratulated him on his honors which, he declared, had never been better deserved.

"And at last I have the news that I have been hoping for for weeks," he said. "I heard from Andre this morning that your mother's property has at last been awarded to her. The last formality is settled, and if she were here she could take possession tomorrow."

Frank wrung the colonel's hand and thanked him with all his heart.

"I shall write my mother tonight," he said. "I'll do better than that! I'll cable. She will be relieved and delighted beyond measure."

"And tell her when you write," smiled the colonel, "that when she is able to come over, I would be delighted to have both you and her spend as much time as possible on my estate."

Frank promised and they parted with warm expressions of mutual regard. And that same night a cable message sped across the Atlantic bearing the good news that Frank was too impatient to wait for a letter to tell her.

A week or two later, the American authorities at Coblenz found it necessary to institute stricter measures. It was found that a large amount of material that should have been left to the American army by the terms of the armistice had been sold to unscrupulous buyers who had purchased it for a song and stored it away to be sold at a large profit later on.

A search was made throughout the city and many hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of the goods were recovered. In looking about for a temporary place to store it, the authorities had commandeered a warehouse which was partly empty. Here they placed the goods and put them under guard of American soldiers.

One night the Army Boys were sent over to relieve the squad then on duty. As they reached the place, Tom and Billy gave an involuntary exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank.

"Why," replied Billy, "this is the warehouse of Mrs. Edsall's father. Their dwelling house is right next door and connects with this."

"You ought to know," grinned Frank.

"You've been here often enough. But it's rather a queer coincidence that we should be sent to guard it."

They entered the cellar where the bulk of the goods was stored.

"So this is the famous 'cellar' that the old man was always muttering about," remarked Frank, as he looked curiously about him.

"The identical place," replied Tom.

It was a long and wide cellar with many bales and barrels stored in it. The only light was from a lantern which had been lighted by the squad they had just relieved, and which hung from a beam at one end, leaving most of the place in darkness.

# CHAPTER XXV

## FOILING THE GERMAN PLOT

"THIS cellar's a nice place to tell ghost stories in," remarked Bart. "It would make a fellow creepy to be in here all by his lonesome."

"I thought I heard a noise down in that end of the cellar," said Tom.

"You're dreaming," said Billy. "Come out of your trance."

But just then there was another noise that all of them heard. It sounded like a scratching noise, or as though someone were inserting a key in a lock.

"Quick!" whispered Frank. "Hold your guns ready and get down behind these bales."

Like a flash they obeyed and waited with bated breath for what should come next.

The scratching continued. Then slowly a door swung open at the far end of the cellar and a figure advanced carrying a candle. He walked with faltering steps, and as he drew nearer they could see that it was Mrs. Edsall's father.

He paused at a part of the wall that was in

shadow and seemed to be searching for something. Then with a sigh of satisfaction he found it. He pressed a spring and a concealed door opened, revealing a small aperture.

The old man reached in his hand and brought out a roll of papers. He glanced over them for a moment in the light of the candle. Then he swung the door shut and turned to go.

But just then there was a startling interruption. From behind a barrel in whose shadow he had been hiding, a man leaped out, and throwing himself on the old man grasped the papers and tore them from him.

The attack was stunning in its suddenness, but the man had scarcely straightened up before the Army Boys had swarmed out of their concealment and seized the intruder. He put up a sharp fight, but in the grasp of those sinewy arms he was helpless. In a moment they had overpowered him. The old man stood by, shaking as though with a palsy.

"Now," said Frank sharply to the intruder, "what does this mean? Tom, bring that lantern here and let's have a look at this man."

Tom did so, and as the light fell on the man's face he uttered an exclamation of surprise that was echoed by Frank and Billy.

"Why," said Frank, "it's the man we saw in Luxemburg!"

"I don't know where you saw me and I don't care," answered the stranger angrily. "I only warn you that you'll get in trouble if you interfere with me in the discharge of my duty. I'm a member of the United States Secret Service."

"Show your authority," said Frank, taken a little aback. "Let go his arms, fellows."

His arms released, the man threw back his coat and showed the badge of his service.

"I've been trailing this man for some time," he said. "We had a suspicion that he was in treasonable relations with the enemy. And I think now I've got the goods on him," he said, as he flourished the bundle of papers.

Here the old man interposed.

"It's false," he cried wildly. "No one is more loyal than I am. Look at those papers. Look quick or it may be too late. The Germans plotted to blow up the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, if it were ever captured by the Americans. Those are the plans. By an oversight of theirs, the papers fell into my hands. I hid them here when I had to leave Coblenz. I did not dare to take them with me for fear I would be searched. That was why I wanted to get back to Coblenz, so that I could give the papers to the American commander. I have been sick, delirious since I returned, and this is the first time I have been able to leave my bed and get here. Look at the plans. And hurry, hurry!"

There was unmistakable sincerity in his tones that startled and impressed even the Secret Service agent. They hurriedly examined the plans. Two minutes sufficed. Ehrenbreitstein, where at that moment thousands of American soldiers were sleeping, might at any moment be blown into atoms!

Two jumps carried Frank out of the cellar. A few more took him to a telephone. There was a quick exchange between him and the fortress. Then the whole party bundled themselves into a car which had been hastily commandeered and were whirled over the bridge and up the hill. A few minutes more, and squads of soldiers, armed to the teeth, had followed the indications of the plans and located enough explosives in a secret passage deep under the fortress to shatter it to fragments. The wires by which they could have been exploded from a distance were found and severed, and only then did the commander of the fortress, who had lived ten years in as many minutes, venture to breathe freely. The bold plot of a desperate band of Germans had been foiled.

But other plots were still to be exposed, and what some of those were will be related in the next volume of this series, to be entitled: "Army Boys on German Soil; Or, Our Doughboys Quelling the Mobs." In that book we shall meet all our friends again and see how bravely they acted under the most trying of circumstances.

"It was a narrow squeak," remarked Frank, a few days after the German plot had been exposed.

"Just what I was saying to Helen this afternoon," said Billy.

"And what were you saying to Alice?" asked Bart, turning to Tom.

"None of your business," grinned Tom.

"They're hopeless cases," remarked Bart.

"Cupid's got the best of them," remarked Frank.

"That's more than the Huns could do," laughed Billy.

"Yes," agreed Frank. "That's more than the Huns could do. They tried their best, but they couldn't put it over on Uncle Sam's Army Boys."

THE END

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